The Deputy, The Thief and The Beast
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The Deputy, The Thief and The Beast

by Justafewthingstosay

Summary

Deputy Juno Steel didn't have the easiest life to begin with. Sheriff Khan didn't really like him, the rest of the station tolerated him. The only good things in his life were his horse and Rita, his secretary.
He didn't think a small bank robbery investigation would change things too much, but when he gets shot in the shoulder and falls unconscious only to wake up in a cave with a wanted criminal, he first thinks it's a joke.
When he manages to leave the cave after being stuck in it with Rex Glass for a day and a half, he hopes for a break. But life is cruel to him, when he gets kidnapped once more, only to now be stuck with the thief again.
Desperate times sometimes just open up our hearts to people we didn’t expect.

Notes

SOOOO FINALLY POSTING TIME!!!!!!

I have been working on this fic for so so long and I'm so glad that I can finally post it.

I want to thank the absolutely lovely Fafsernir for betaing and being there for when I needed to rant about it. He also wrote a fic that you should check out!!!! Feeling Right

And of course, I want to thank the absolutely wonderful Robin Kasznia for being amazing to work with and I can't wait to share the art they created for this piece!

Btw! There is a Playlist

Gunfights over Red Sands

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Steel!” Khan’s voice startled Juno so much that he almost fell out of his chair.

“Yeah?” He called back, the Sheriff station wasn’t super big, so calling for one another was the norm there.

“I hope you didn’t forget that you are supposed to meet with Min Kanagawa in about 10 minutes?” Khan asked and Juno could tell that Khan knew that he had almost forgotten it, or he wouldn’t have called him.

“Of course not,” he lied, picking up his hat and his leather duster to make his way to the Kanagawa bank as quickly as possible.

“Boss!” Rita called after him, a stack of papers in her hand but he waved her off.

“Not now, Rita. I’ll be back in around half an hour if I’m lucky,” He called towards her, running out of the Sheriff's Station and seeing his horse, Small Fry, standing where he had left her. Quick, practised hands untied the knot that she was tethered to the pole with, before he jumped on her back and gave her a soft press against her sides, letting her know that they had to go fast.

As he reached the Bank, though, he noticed that being slow might not have been such a bad idea.

The bank had fallen into the hands of a shootout. A group of bandits he had never seen before were shooting at the Kanagawa security, but not only at them, because only a short minute after Juno had dismounted, a shot flew past him.

Out of instinct, he hit Small Fry on the hind, urging her to move out of the fire line.

“This is really the last thing I needed today,” he grumbled as he hid behind a small cart, making sure his weapon was loaded fully before appearing from behind it and shooting the man closest to him, hitting him right in the shoulder.

Juno knew that he had always been a good shot, the best in the entire HCPD. At least according to his records, but even with that knowledge in the back of his head, he was scared. Practising was always easier than the real thing, at least the targets at practice didn’t shoot back.

So he tried to stay out of line of sight. He took out three men before a shot came even close to hitting him, but in that second, he didn’t pay attention. A second can mean life or death on the battlefield. It can be a life saving second or a second that leaves you open enough to be vulnerable and a second is all the bandit needed.

Juno heard the shoot before he felt it. As his head flipped towards the sound, the bullet embedded itself in his shoulder, digging deeper and deeper through his flesh. The pain was searing hot, as his nerves threatened to combust in his shoulder. He let himself fall backwards, his now damp shoulder hitting the sandy floor. Blood mixing with the beige colour of the sand, Juno knew that with the amount of rain they got, the sand would be stained with his blood for a while.

He managed to stifle the scream that wanted to escape his lips when the shocks of the impact went through him. If he screamed they'd know he was still alive. So he kept quiet, trying to rob backwards, dragging his body carefully through the desert sand. Slowly he noticed his vision shift, small black circles appearing in his eyesight. He was done for, he was going to die here in the sand stained red with his blood. So he felt himself fall, his eyes now trained at the sky, the sun stinging in his eyes as he closed his eyelids for what he thought was the last time.

Juno's head stung when he woke up. There was a searing pain in his shoulder but as he tried to reach for it, he noticed that he couldn't, because his hands were tied in front of him.

His sight was still a bit blurry, so he looked around, blinking regularly to wake himself up, to blink things into focus.

Even if his vision was blurry, he noticed a few things.

Number one, he heard the crackling of a bonfire, so he was somewhere decently warm.

Number two, there was something around his shoulders, it felt like a blanket, providing him with a little bit of extra warmth.

Number three, the blanket smelt incredible. It was a scent he couldn't place, something he had never smelt before, but he liked it.

His eyes focused after a while and he looked around, only to have his suspicions confirmed.

He was sitting in a decently sized cave, his back against one of the walls, his hands tied with thick rope. But the knot wasn't terribly tight, which was a relief for his painful shoulder.

His shoulder.

And then, he remembered. He had gotten shot in that shootout, it was a surprise that he would even wake up again after that.

There was no one with him in the cave, but there were supplies. A single bedroll, a satchel that seemed to be filled with things, a pot and a pan. And there were his things, his holster with his gun, his hat. His bloodsoaked coat. He must have lost a lot of blood, but he could feel bandaged on his skin, proof that his wound had been tended to. So the person who had brought him here must have helped him in some ways.

But his hands were still tied.

That was when he heard a noise, a horse neighing and the rustle of metal and leather. And a voice. He looked towards the entrance of the cave and saw the last slivers of daylight. A probably gorgeous sunset in the making, but that also meant that he couldn't leave until morning. Hell, that was if he could ever leave.

"It's okay, Ruby, you can have the saddle off for tonight. And leave our new friend's horse some food, will you?" the voice said.

It was a sultry voice, a voice that was soft in a way that Juno hadn't expected his captor to sound like.

He leaned his head back, closing his eyes just enough so that he could still see a little bit but also pretend to be asleep as he heard his captor walk in. He was carrying a saddle that was ordained with small metal bits, the leather dark and strong and very well used.

He must spend a lot of time in that saddle.

Juno let his gaze move upwards to look at the man holding the saddle. He was tall and thin, but you could see obvious muscles moving under the shirt as he set the saddle down, close to the fire. His entire clothing was in different shades of black, it reminded Juno of a man made of smoke. Perfect to hide in the shadows and watch, observe, strike at the perfect moment. He had black slicked-back hair that he probably hid under the dark hat that was lying with the rest of his supplies.

He knew the man from somewhere, had seen that face before. But he didn't remember where, which was never a good thing, because then it meant he had probably seen it on a wanted poster and that meant that those two long knives on his captor's thighs weren't being used to widdle.

"I know you're awake, Sheriff," the man smiled and turned to Juno and that was when it hit him. The sharp teeth, that dangly earring. He had seen him on a wanted poster from a while ago. Rex Glass. 10 thousand creds on his head, if Juno remembered correctly, and he normally did.

"Ain't no sheriff," Juno bit back, his voice sharp, his mind sharper. He followed Glass' every step with his eyes, worried he might miss something, worried he might miss a clue that would help free him.

"Ah, apologies, Deputy?" he said in a questioning tone and Juno nodded, watching the man move closer to him, pulling the big knife from his right thigh.

"If you think I'm not going to fight back, then you're very wrong. I ain't that easy to kill."

Those words made the man stop in his tracks before he chuckled softly. “I’m not coming over to kill you.”

“Then why are you coming over?” Juno cut in and the man just smiled.

“It’s gonna be really hard for you to eat with your hands tied, won’t it? Also, I really don’t want to put a strain on your shoulder. It was hard enough to get it to stop bleeding in the first place, it would be quite annoying if the wound opened up again, just because you didn’t let me help.”

Juno studied Glass’ face carefully. He didn’t seem to mean him harm. Or if he did, then he was being really stupid about it. Juno had been knocked out for at least 3 hours, that was plenty of time to kill a lady. Especially when he had been bleeding out anyway.

So he took his chance and allowed Glass to step closer, and to cut the rope that was binding his hands. He did it quickly, precisely. Knowing perfectly how to move the blade in that quick flourish without so much as touching Juno’s skin with the metal.

“I apologise, I’m great at tying knots, but not the best at untying them, so I thought cutting them might be faster, but I do understand that you might have gotten a tad worried about me wanting to stab you.” Glass moved away from Juno again, while the former captive was rubbing his wrists, he rolled his right shoulder for good measure, keeping the left one as still as he possibly could. At least it wasn’t his shooting arm that was out of commission.

“So, Deputy-” Glass started as he sat down next to the fire, filling the pot with what looked like a few spices and some water, before pulling out a small bag from his satchel. “What may I call you?”

Juno hesitated for a moment, he knew that he was decently known in the area around Hyperion City, so he worried that Glass might catch his bluff if he lied. “Juno, Juno Steel-” and then without a second thought, he decided that maybe letting the other man know that he knew things might be a bad idea. “-And what may I call you?”

Glass grinned over the fire while stirring the pot casually. His teeth poking out, making the grin almost inhuman, but Juno had to admit to himself that he didn’t mind seeing that grin. The wanted Posters didn’t do the man any justice, they didn’t capture that smile, the sharp eyes and they definitely didn’t capture that smell which seemed to be filling the entire cave.

That smell that was definitely coming from Glass. Strong and otherworldly. It was an aroma that Juno could get used to, but thinking about the situation he was in, he probably shouldn’t be hoping for that.

“Juno? Like the goddess of protection? Fitting for a lawman like yourself, I must say. My name is Perseus Shah.”

Perseus Shah? Now that wasn’t what he expected while also being everything Juno had expected. Of course, he would use an Alias, sitting here across from Juno, a deputy, whose sole job was to bring people like him to justice and throw him in a cell to rot. But something small inside of Juno told him that he wouldn’t have done that, even if Glass had admitted to all the crimes that were said to be his, if he had bowed to the ground in front of Juno’s feet and begged him to bring him in, there was something that Juno would have stopped him from doing so. He just had no idea what that was.

“So why were you at the bank, Shah? How do I know you're not the one who shot me in the first place and only kidnapped me because you felt bad?” Juno spat out. He knew that he was probably playing

with fire, as his gun and his holster were lying out of reach unless he stood up to get them. But with the way that Glass, or Shah, as he had introduced himself, was handling those blades... Juno had the feeling that even if he managed to reach his gun in time, he would have a knife sticking out of him before he could actually shoot.

“Well, Juno, what do you think I was doing at the bank?” he raised his eyebrows at Juno while he spoke, looking over the glasses framing his face.

Juno felt a small smile form on his face. Rule Number one of being interrogated: only ever answer with questions.

“Honestly, I’m not too sure, Shah, that’s why I asked.”

Glass smiled but didn’t answer, simply taking out two bowls, filling both of them with the soup before handing one of them to Juno with half a loaf of bread.

“Eat something,” he urged, before sitting back down and starting to eat himself.

Juno would have worried about being poisoned if he hadn’t seen Glass fill both of their bowls from the same pot and break the bread in half. As if this criminal hadn’t literally tried his best to keep Juno alive.

So Juno dunked a piece of bread into the broth-like soup carefully, making sure to not burn his hands, before sticking it into his mouth. It was only then that he realised how hungry he was.

He started eating faster, taking large bites of the bread and pretended not to notice how Glass was looking at him. With something in his

eyes that Juno might have called “care”.

Just when he finished his part of the bread, he heard a small, soft “Hey.” He looked up in time to catch Glass’ piece of bread, that was just thrown at him. “You take it,” he added, before putting the bowl to his lips and gulping the rest of his soup. While he was drinking, Juno only stared at him.

Juno watched the man in front of him swallow the last drop of his soup before putting the bowl down.

“What is it, Juno?” Glass sighed, lying down on his back, his profile to Juno, now. He tucked his hands behind his head and stared at the ceiling of the cave.

“Why did you give me your piece of bread?” Juno whispered and he heard his own voice grow soft.

“Because you lost a lot of blood, your body needs food to regenerate itself,” was the answer that was spoken towards the ceiling instead of him.

Juno took a bit of the bread, not knowing how to answer. Glass was right, he needed the food. But Juno had never expected him to give away his bread without hesitation. He had never expected to be treated with such kindness by a man who was technically on the other side of the law. His enemy.

It was quiet for a while, Juno eating what was left of his soup and bread and Glass just staring at the ceiling. But then Juno decided to break the silence.

“Why did you bring me here?” Juno asked carefully. He was still at this man’s mercy after all.

Glass turned his head to the side, looking at Juno with his dark eyes. “I didn’t want to just let you die, is that so hard to believe?”

Juno snorted softly. “Honestly? Yes. Yes, it is.”

Glass shifted, propping himself up on his left elbow and lying on his side. His face was twisted in amused confusion. “And why is that, Deputy?”

Juno leaned back against the rock again, pulling the blanket tighter around himself. “Well, it's not a normal occurrence that a thief saves a person of the law now, is it?”

A grin spread over Glass’ face, his eyebrows furrowed. “Why do you think I’m a thief?”

That made the injured lady laugh. “I’m not an idiot-” and then, he stopped himself for a second, debating if he should tell Glass that he knew who he was, or if he should keep that secret to himself. He decided on the latter. “-Shah. If you had been just a normal man, you wouldn’t have brought me to a cave in the middle of nowhere to sew me back up. So, tell me, what do you want from me?”

The man nodded, raising his eyebrows in a short motion. “That doesn’t explain to me why you specifically think that I’m a thief, though.”

Juno shifted under the blanket, and more of that scent flew into his

nose. “Well, lucky guess?” he tried to lie, but Glass just raised one eyebrow, staring him down.

The deputy let out a small groan before he started to explain. “When you walked in here with the saddle, it looked like you were purposefully making more noise than you are used to, your frame isn’t something that I would normally associate with a bandit, because they get into fistfights more often than they probably appreciate. Which brings me to my last point, your knives.”

Glass cocked his head to the side, just slightly, barely noticeable, if only Juno hadn’t been staring at that face.

“Guns are, for most bandits or highwaymen, their weapon of choice, but you decided to go with daggers. Yes, of course, you can throw them, but that means picking them back up. So you strike me as a person who, when it comes to fighting, will do so in close range and will need to be quiet. So, therefore, thief.”

Glass didn’t dignify his theory with a response, just turned onto his back again, putting his hands under his head.

Juno stared. He knew that he did, he watched how those muscles moved under the tight-cut black shirt, he had watched how it stretched upwards, threatening to be pulled out of the man’s trousers.

He was only pulled away from looking when the man finally spoke, without looking at Juno. “Your horse is tied up outside, I gave her some water and enough space to move around. You can leave whenever you want to, but I would wait until the morning. It’s a terror to ride in the darkness in these parts,” the man’s voice lingered as if he was waiting for Juno to ask a question.

But as he turned his back on the Deputy, Juno swallowed his

questions. Except for one.

“How do I know that you won’t kill me in my sleep?”

Glass didn’t turn to face him, just made a small sound that sounded like a laugh. “How do I know *you* won’t kill me, Juno? You would have every reason to.”

Juno looked down onto the bedroll that he was sitting on before he carefully lowered himself down. He made sure that his shoulder didn’t move too much, as he didn’t want the wound to reopen because of his carelessness.

Just as he pulled the blanket over him, bellowing in the scent, he heard the breathing of the man slow. There was no doubt that he was asleep. So Juno laid there, in a cave, on his back. His face turned towards the strange man, watching him as if his life depended on it, even though he didn’t fear for his life. No, Glass had saved him. Stitched him up and fed him, he didn’t have to fear. But something inside him told him to keep his eyes trained on that back. Just to make sure.

So that was how he fell asleep, surrounded by the scent of a thief, his eyelids closing over the tired eyes that had been so focused on the criminal that he was surprised that they hadn’t fallen out and walked over to him, to get a better look.

Soft lips caressing his left cheek were the first thing Juno felt when he woke up. He swatted at the assailant with a careful hand, feeling fur under his palm as he managed to hit them.

As his eyes fluttered open, his vision fell onto the nose of his horse, Small Fry. She was nuzzling his face affectionately until he moved his right arm up to pet her.

“Good morning to you too, Small Fry,” he whispered out. While he petted her snout, the events of the day before came back to him, and it hit him like a train when he noticed that they weren’t in the Sheriff stables, where he sometimes blacked out after drinking just a few too many.

He slung his good arm over her neck and she pulled him up easily, receiving a few pets in return. A quick check of the cave told him that he was alone, but Glass’ stuff was still here. The wood in the fire was still glowing, still emitting a sliver of warmth.

Small Fry was still saddled, her dark brown hackamore on her face didn’t look like it had been touched and he was checking on her saddle with his one good hand when Glass reappeared.

The man was running inside, his head lowered, his arms around a bunch of sticks and dried grass, definitely there to keep the fire alive and behind him was a large chestnut coloured horse, following him inside without a second guess.

As Glass shook off the sand that sat on his hat, Juno dared to look at the entrance of the cave, only to realise that he couldn’t see more than two meters outside of it. A sandstorm.

Perfect.

Juno sighed and let his head fall against Small Fry’s side, her head moving backwards to nuzzle his ear.

That was when Glass noticed that he was awake. “Ah, good morning, Juno. I don’t want to disappoint you, but I don’t think there is a way for you to get back to Hyperion today.” Glass seemed neither sad nor disappointed about that, though. He seemed… intrigued, almost delighted. If Juno had been a more religious person he might have thought that Glass had prayed for it to happen, but that still left the question of why.

Juno just groaned, annoyed mostly at himself for getting into this situation, but also a little at Glass for saving him in the first place. He stroked Small Fry’s neck for a while until he noticed that he should take off her saddle, which was going to be impossible with one arm.

So he did what he had to do. He loosed her stomach straps on his own, managing to open them without bothering her too much before he turned around and faced the inevitable.

His hand went to the back of his head to stroke it awkwardly. “Hey, Shah?”

The man, who was just tending to his horse by giving her a few pets down the front of her face, turned around. “Yes, Juno?”

“Would you-” He pointed at the saddle. “Would you take her saddle off for me? I can’t really reach there on my own and I definitely won't be able to take it off.”

And there it was again, that grin. That grin that made Juno worry that Glass was going to devour him whole, while also making him wish that that would be the case.

“Of course, give me one moment.” He gave his horse a single last pet before he made his way over, smiling at Juno. He stood right beside

him, lifting his arms and pulling the saddle off.

If you had asked Juno what he was doing while Glass did that, he would have never told you the truth. Wouldn't have told you the fact that he was looking at those strong arms lifting the saddle without a problem.

He was watching and as soon as Glass put the saddle down and turned back around to face him, Juno realised that Glass had seen. That grin, the look behind his glasses, there was no doubt about it. Glass had seen him check him out and Juno wanted to die.

Glass didn't move and just stared at the shorter man. "So, I suppose we have some time to kill, then. Any suggestions?"

Juno had suggestions alright, but most of them weren't really what you'd call family-friendly, so he decided on the one that was. "How about a game of cards?"

Glass' face seemed to widen at that. "Which one do you propose?"

He took a few seconds, thinking about which one he was good at, and which he wasn't and in the end decided to go with one he was decent at. "How about Rummikub?"

"Oh yes, I'm terrible at it, but it sounds good."

Chapter End Notes

The Fanart of their outfits was drawn by the amazing Robin Kasznia, if you don't know them, you should go and check them out!!!!

Next Chapter will be uploaded on the **13th of May**

Uncomfortable Truths

Chapter Notes

> So folks! Chapter 2 is here! I want to once again thank Fafsernir for betaing and I hope you go over to her profile and read her story for this bang!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Glass had lied. They had played for what felt like 30 minutes and Glass had won almost every single time, except the two times that Juno had managed to win just with the cards in his hand but, otherwise, Juno was no match to the man. So, by the eighth time the man said: “Oh, looks like I won.” Juno wanted to throw a log at him.

“Wow, you really are *terrible* at it, huh?” Juno asked, not hiding the annoyance in his voice. But when Glass grinned, Juno had the feeling he couldn’t actually be mad.

“Well, I’ve never met anyone who was worse at it than me, so I apologise for making assumptions, Deputy.”

Juno just nodded and uttered a small “Sure,” while he shuffled the cards, but before he could deal the cards, a soft hand landed on his. His eyes trailed up the arm to meet Glass’ face.

“How about we play a different game?” His eyes looked so hopeful, the brown so deep that Juno could drown in then, and Juno had the feeling that even if he were to try, he wouldn’t be able to deny him anything at that moment.

“Sure, which game were you thinking?” he asked. He didn’t hand over the cards, just waited for instructions.

“It’s called Questions of Faith, and it's really easy. We both get a pile of cards and each of us asks a question, whoever draws the lowest one has to answer the question of the other, truthfully, or if they don’t know the answer, to the best of their knowledge. Interested?” Glass asked and Juno would have been lying if he had said no.

So, he agreed.

“Alright, I will ask a question and then you ask one and then we draw at the same time, okay?”

The deputy nodded, handing Glass half of the deck to draw from.

“What is your horse’s name?” Glass asked as if it was the most interesting question in the world.

“What were you doing at the bank?”

They drew at the same time, both their eyes locked.

Juno drew a Jack of Diamonds, but Glass drew an Ace of Diamonds, so Juno answered.

“Her name is Small Fry,” he said quickly, the horse looking towards him for a second, before going on with her business.

Glass took both of their cards and looked at Juno before ripping them in half and throwing them into the small fire.

“What the-”

“Makes cheating impossible, Juno. Your question?” There it was again, that grin which leaned towards something almost predatory.

“How old are you?”

“Since when have you been a Deputy?”

Locked eyes. Draw.

Juno got a 10 of Spades, Glass an 8 of Diamonds.

“I’m 36, if you must know.”

The cards were ripped and joined their compatriots in the fire.

“Do you work alone?” Juno asked carefully, hoping that the answer would be positive, only to make sure that he didn’t have to fear an ambush.

“Are you married?” Glass asked back. His eyebrows rose and a grin appeared on his face, so smug that it felt like he was playing Juno like a fiddle, but the cards hadn’t been drawn yet, everything was still up to fate.

Their eyes locked, their hands drew their cards.

Juno had a King of Spades. Glass a Queen of Spades.

“I mostly work alone, yes. Unless a pretty lady decides to join me,” he spoke in that sultry voice of his and then he had the audacity to wink at Juno.

Juno picked up the cards, ripped them and threw them into the fire. If he was doing that just to hide the blush on his cheeks, he wouldn’t tell.

“What brought you to Hyperion?” the Deputy asked, trying to change the topic back to why Glass had been on the crime scene.

“Are you married?” he repeated the same question as before.

Juno’s card outranked Glass’ 5 of Clubs, being a 6 of diamonds.

“A job.”

“What kind of job?” Juno inquired but Glass’ only picked up their cards and threw them into the fire.

“Are you married?”

This was the first time that Juno lost after the horse question.

The cards ended up in the fire.

“I’m not, if you must know. What were you doing at the bank?”

“Are you single?”

Juno’s 6 of Spades beat Glass’ 4 of clubs.

“I was scouting out the location for a future job.”

“What did you want to steal?”

“Is anybody waiting for you at home?”

Juno drew a 9 of spades and the man in front of him drew the Queen of Hearts. They were chugged into the fire by Glass who didn’t take his eyes off of Juno the entire time.

“No one but my secretary, and maybe my boss, but he probably already replaced me, to be quite honest,” Juno whispered, just now noticing how sad his condition actually was. “Well, I mean, I have a few friends, allies, enemies, you know, the usual.”

Glass looked away for a split second, staring at his horse. “I actually don’t, would you enlighten me?”

Only after he spoke the words, did he turn back to Juno, as if speaking them made him uncomfortable, vulnerable.

It made Juno sit up straighter, the desperation in Glass' voice obvious.

"One more question and I will, alright?"

Glass smiled carefully and nodded, before he spoke, "Ever thought of leaving Hyperion?"

Juno grinned back, confidence in his stature. "Why did you tell me that your name is Perseus Shah, Rex Glass?"

Glass' jaw dropped slightly, but his smile didn't falter.

9 of Spades for Juno, 7 of hearts for Glass or Shah or whoever he really was.

The cards went into the fire.

"So? Rex? Perseus? Or do you have another alias that you feel more comfortable with?"

"You see, Juno, only an idiot would become a thief under his real name. Names hold power, names connect you to things, to people, places. So I prefer to go without one."

"But you have a real name, yes?"

Glass grinned, "Of course I do, but it would take someone really

special for me to ever tell it, especially now."

Juno's brows furrowed. He understood why- Rex? Glass..? The thief. Why he didn't want to tell him his real name. He was right, he was easier to track, easier to threaten. Those things didn't happen when no one knew your weak spots when no one knew who you really were.

It must be a terribly lonely existence to not be known by anyone.

"Can I ask another question?" Juno asked carefully. Staring into the man's eyes. They were brown and deep, eyes that Juno could get lost in if he wasn't careful.

The thief just nodded. "Sure, ask away."

Juno looked away for a second, only for his eyes to find the other's again when he started speaking: "Are you lonely?"

It was the first time that the thief's smile faltered, disappeared and was completely replaced by a downwards twist of his lips.

Juno wanted nothing more than to kiss that frown off the man's face and if he had been a weaker man, he might have. But he was strong and just kept staring into those dark eyes.

The thief looked away for the first time, making it impossible for Juno to meet his eyes. "I think my questions have been answering that question, haven't they, Juno?"

The brown eyes found his when he spoke those last words and there was a pool of sadness in them that was so deep that Juno was

surprised that he didn't fall in and drown in that second.

"I'm sorry," the deputy mumbled out. He hadn't meant to make the other man uncomfortable or hurt. To be honest with himself, he didn't even know why he had asked that question in the first place. Was it curiosity? Interest? Or was it maybe his empathy?

Juno Steel wasn't a man who had many friends. Hell, he had more enemies than friends and he had the feeling that most of the people who he would call friends, wouldn't call him that back. But at least he had someone. But this man, this thief without a name, he seemed lonely. He seemed sad. He seemed like he had been wearing a mask for far too long, so long that even he himself didn't know what face was lying beneath it.

He only now noticed that the man in front of him had scoffed. "Why are you apologising, Juno? I gave you the full right to ask the question, don't feel bad for satisfying your curiosity."

Even though the thief had said that he shouldn't feel bad, the look on his face told Juno that he had faked that smile for far too long, for far too many people. For a brief second, he asked himself what the thief's real smile might look like when he was careless and happy. When nothing in the world could hurt him. What would his facial expression be? Juno doubted that he would ever find out, and he ignored how his stomach clenched up at the thought that he might never get to see true happiness on this man's face.

He shook his head slightly. This man was a criminal, someone Juno was supposed to bring to justice, someone his superiors would have hanged. Someone who shouldn't pique his curiosity so much, someone who he shouldn't give two shits about, but here he was. Caring.

"It still was a hurtful question. I should have thought about it before I said anything," Juno said carefully. He didn't know how to come back

from that. He didn't know what he could say to lift the heavy blanket that was now lying on their conversation. He didn't know what to say to make it better, make it okay again. So he kept quiet, waiting for the thief to speak, waiting for the man to break the terrible silence that encompassed both of them.

But the thief didn't speak up. He was staring out of the cave, watching the storm catch the sand and move it, replace it, change the entire area to something different while also staying the exact same.

So, when the thief decided to not break the silence, Juno did.

"I won't tell anyone that you were here," he spoke, barely loud enough for the other to hear, who whipped his head around at the sound of those words.

"I had hoped you'd say that, but I do have to say that I am a little surprised."

Juno looked up to meet the other's eyes, the brown suffocating him in the best way, holding onto his gaze with a tight grasp. "You saved my life, also I don't even know your name, because it seems like every name we know from you is a lie."

The thief's eyebrows shot up. "Well, I suppose you aren't wrong with that statement. Thank you, Juno Steel, for deciding to not side with the law on my behalf."

The deputy only rolled his eyes. "Don't mention it."

"Alright, if you say so."

They fell out of conversation after that, but it didn't feel uncomfortable. The thief just pulled out a book and started reading, Juno was playing Solitaire with his own cards that he kept in Small Fry's saddlebags.

It was weirdly nice, it was almost comfortable.

After a while of their silence, the thief started to make them food, another stew type broth with a piece of bread. It wasn't much and Juno did miss the comfort of eating multiple meals a day, but he was happy that they at least had something. And for a moment, while he sat there in that cave, he had the feeling that he would enjoy this life, if he was ever given the opportunity to live it.

Which, of course, would never happen, but it was just food for thoughts more than anything. Just something that Juno could think about while staring into his glass at the end of the day. Something that he could imagine when he thought about the thief without a name.

They continued their quiet and calm activities from earlier, barely looking at each other, except when Juno stole some glances at the other. It was during one of those glances that Juno noticed that the thief had turned to lay on his side, a blanket now covering his frame and his glasses lying on the book next to the saddle that he used as a makeshift pillow.

He looked strangely peaceful. His frame rising and lowering itself with every breath. His hair falling out of the neatly slicked back hairstyle. He was a sight to behold and Juno was taking in every single bit of it, before he himself lay down on his back, trying not to strain his shoulder too much.

He fell asleep quickly, his body tired from trying to heal and his mind

tired from trying to understand the answers and intentions of the man who was sleeping only a few feet away from him.

Chapter End Notes

First and foremost, the next chapter will be uploaded on the **15th of May!**

I hope you liked this chapter, if you did, please let me know!
Comments and Kudos are always appreciated!
Much love and until the 15th!!

Alone again, naturally

Chapter Summary

> And then, suddenly Juno Steel was alone again. Like he had always been. There were few things that came to him as naturally as being alone. What that said about him, he didn't know, but he also tried not to think about it too much.

Chapter Notes

> So here it is, Chapter 3! I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Juno awoke the next morning, he was alone with his horse. And for a second, he had the feeling that maybe everything that had happened was a dream. That the thief had just been a humanisation of his fears, but he knew that wasn't the truth. Without that man, he would have been dead.

He owed him his life. In a weird way, he owed this man, whom he didn't even know the real name of, everything.

But that thought was quickly dismissed from his brain when he shook his head quickly. He didn't owe the man anything. He was a thief. He was on the opposite side of the law, he was, strictly speaking, Juno's enemy.

He tried to tell himself that, while he stood up. He repeated it like a mantra in his head, but when he looked at Small Fry and saw that she was saddled and readied for him, even his bags, except for the bedroll and the blanket that he had used to sleep, had been packed and readied for him, he couldn't think that. The thief had known that Juno was incapable of doing all of that without his second arm. He had taken his time before Juno awoke to make Juno's way back to civilisation as easy as possible, as comfortable as possible.

He couldn't understand how this man could be bad, even though he must be. There must have been some terrible things that he had done to deserve that amount of money on his head. Juno knew that he should let it go, forget about it, but as he rolled up his bedroll as well as he could with one arm, he accidentally moved his left shoulder and he almost screamed. The thief had saved his life, and he had asked for nothing in return and Juno did not understand why.

He knew that this wouldn't let him go, at least not for a while. So he just folded the blanket, that he knew didn't belong to him, and threw it over his horse with his bedroll.

He quickly checked the perimeter. Seeing that even the last log had been reduced to small embers, he threw a bit of sand on the remaining wood: he could never be too careful.

But with that, he knew that he had to leave this cave, say goodbye. And so he pushed his foot into the stirrup and pulled himself up with his good hand. He lightly tapped Small Fry's side with his boots and together they made their way towards Hyperion City.

Juno thought of moving quickly to town, but as he pushed Small Fry to fall into a trot, the movements stung in his shoulder, so he slowed her down back to her normal walk and just let his thoughts wander for the time that it took him to get back home.

He wasn't sure where to go first. He knew he should check in with the physician, but he also wanted to go home and sleep for the next five days, but he thought of the Thief's hard work that he had done just to keep Juno alive. So he decided that he was going to see the physician first.

Three hours went by until Juno saw the first houses of Hyperion city. They were the small outskirts of the big city and in a small nagging push of nostalgia, he decided to ride through Old Town.

He knew it would take him longer, but it was just a little detour, nothing too bad.

Small Fry's hooves on the pressed down sand were one of the only things that he heard. The wind sighing through the cracks in between the planks of wood of the old buildings. Old Town had always felt alive, never happy, but always alive.

Alive. It was a strange word, a word that meant something so simple, something so easy to understand that even a fly on the wall could understand it, but in this moment, Juno doubted. Had he ever been alive? Had he ever taken a fresh breath? The thief had been in his life for not even two days and Juno could feel that something was different. He had no intention of telling the sheriff, even though the bounty on the man's head had been a hefty one. One of the highest that they had ever had.

But, still, Juno felt torn. A thief who saves a Deputy's life can't be a very good thief, at least not one who is good at self-preservation.

On the other hand, though, Juno didn't even know this man's name. He knew nothing. Hell, the man could have left so early in the morning that he could be in the next city by now.

He tried to shift his attention back on the road, taking a sharp left to get to the physician quicker, because there was a voice, deep in his mind, that softly, quietly mumbled: "You can't figure out if you've ever been alive if you die now," and even though the voice sounded condescending and weirdly familiar, he agreed with it.

The ride to the physician's office from Old Town wasn't a long one, so he found himself dismounting Small Fry carefully, trying and failing to not strain his shoulder. It stung with every move. On horseback he had easily found a position that didn't hurt him but, now, with the pain running down his shoulder and up his spine, he was grateful that he had decided to come here before going home.

He walked inside slowly, making sure to not let his feet fall too heavily on the floor, trying to steady himself with his right arm against the wall, his energy fleeting him. He had lost a lot of blood and he noticed it now more than he had before.

"Doc! Juno here, I could really use a check-up," He called out. It wasn't terribly loud, but the office wasn't big, so his voice carried far enough for the man to walk out of the back to greet him.

"Juno! I am hap-" the chipper tone of his voice disappeared as soon as he laid eyes on Juno. "What happened?" He asked in a hushed voice, moving closer to put Juno's good arm around his shoulders and pull him to the side room.

"Got shot, left shoulder. Two days ago? I think? I'm not sure," he explained while trying to keep up with the older man, who was basically dragging him.

"Oh god, Juno, you can be happy that you are still walking."

He was manhandled onto an operating table, the hard wood pressing against his sore back and he winced as the Doc moved his arm. "I'm sorry, but I need to take a look at the wound, just to make sure that you are not going to bleed out on me the second I let you go."

Juno just nodded, not really paying attention to his words, but instead

trying to focus his attention to how his right hand clutched the wood of the table, white-knuckled and terrified of the pain he would feel in a minute.

The Doc was being careful not to move Juno too much when he undid the buttons on his shirt, before pushing it off one shoulder, revealing decently clean bandages. There was a little blood on them, but it looked to be older, seemingly from the first wrap up of his wound. He knew that the thief hadn't changed his bandages afterwards, so he hoped that the wound had not started to bleed again.

He let out a wince as the cold metal of the blunt-edged scissors were sat atop his left shoulder so that the Doc could cut the bandages.

Trying to keep his thoughts away from the sensation of the cold metal slowly cutting the fabric, his wound revealed to the world, he stared at the Doc.

He didn't know much about the man, hell, he didn't even know his name. But he knew how the man acted, how he cared for the town, even the poor that couldn't actually pay him well for his efforts.

All in all, the doc was a good man, but he was getting old, his hair was almost completely white at this point, thin-framed glasses sat atop his nose, hiding the crow's feet that Juno knew were behind the thick glass.

Doc needed to find an apprentice sooner or later, but no one was good enough for him. There weren't many people that would work just for the good deed they had done, leaving their work without any money for food that day. Doc was one of them though and many people, especially the poor, owed him their lives, and Juno did too.

The last bit of fabric was cut and the first thing that Juno heard was a soft, almost inaudible gasp. Juno wasn't sure if it was a good gasp or a bad one, so he tried to keep his mouth shut to wait for an explanation.

But Juno had never really been the patient type. “What is it Doc? That bad?” he tried to joke, but it sounded just as concerned as he was. Fear laced in his bones. He had always expected to die of a shot to the head or a fight gone wrong. Not from a gunshot wound that would infect itself. But if that was how the universe wanted to say goodbye to him, it was allowed to be his guest and try.

“Not in the slightest, Juno. This is remarkable work, who did this?” The older man said, carefully cleaning the bit of spilt blood from Juno’s skin with a rag soaked in alcohol.

Doc got a little too close to the stitches with his rag and Juno winced in pain, his body trying to recoil from the pain but his brain not allowing it. “Didn’t get his name. Why?”

The old man waited a few seconds before administering the rag against the wound once more. “It's a shame. We need a new doctor in town, you know this just as much as I do, Juno. I am old, but I will not retire until we find a replacement. A city like ours needs physicians.”

Juno thought back, he had been unconscious while the thief had stitched him up, but he could imagine it now. Long, swift fingers moving over his chest with careful ease, the tips of those fingers stained with his blood. His face was pulled into an expression that Juno wanted to describe as care, but wasn’t sure he should.

“Don’t get attached,” he told himself in his head. There was no use getting attached to a man without a name, a face without an identity. The only thing true about him was that he was a criminal, another man wanted by the law. Another man that Juno needed to find.

He was the first man though, that Juno had let go. He was the first man who put his life at risk to save Juno. The first to cut his ties, to let himself be completely vulnerable in front of Juno.

Hell, he had given Juno his gun back, he had fed him. He had fallen asleep before the Deputy. With any other Deputy that would have been a death sentence for that man, so why had he decided to trust Juno?

It was just another one of those questions that Juno didn't know the answer to, and probably never would. So he just raised his right hand and dragged it over his face as he focused his brain back onto the pain in his left shoulder, the quiet humming of the physician over him and the soft song of the wind howling through the houses.

Everything was the same in Hyperion, except that it wasn't. He wasn't. And he still didn't know why he was changed. It felt like the answer hung in the air, but Juno was too blind to see it, too slow to catch it. Too stupid to make sense of it.

So he decided to not crawl after answers for the rest of the day. He would go home, bundle himself up in his blanket and maybe the blanket of the thief as well, the nights got cold in his tiny hut when he couldn't keep the furnace running, and he would simply sleep until his body had actually restored all the blood in him.

He would need it, he still had a case to solve on top of all of his other problems, but that could wait until his body wasn't lying on a wooden table, slowly being wrapped in white linen.

With a soft tug of the fabric, he felt the doc pin it in place. "Come see me when the pain gets worse or when it starts bleeding again. You can be happy that your mysterious saviour cauterized the wound. It probably saved your life," the older man said, walking over to a basin

to wash his hands. He said it so absently as if Juno didn't already know that he owed the thief his life.

Slowly he sat up, pushing himself with his right hand, to not put any strain on his left shoulder. He didn't want to undo everything that the thief and the Doc had done to help him.

"Thank you, I will pay-"

But the man interrupted him before he could finish. "Payment isn't necessary, you know this Juno. Not for you, the Sheriff pays me to watch after his Deputy and I will do so. No matter where they hurt themselves."

Doc smiled at him, the laugh lines next to his eyes apparent, just like the dimples that started to hide between the wrinkles on his face. It was one of those moments where Juno really noticed how old this man really was, what he must know about people. Hell, he was the only physician in town that most people could afford. He must have seen many things, so much bloodshed, and still, he remained kind and helpful to all. It was something that Juno admired, even though he had no idea how to pursue it for himself.

"Thank you, Doc. For everything," He said while making his way to the door and there was something more in those words. It wasn't just a "thank you for stitching me back together every time I hurt myself", it was also a "Thank you for being there when Ben died, thank you for helping me through it all."

"Anytime Juno, now get home and rest. I don't want to be the one that feels Rita's wrath because you kept thanking me. It's only my job. Now please, if you don't mind, you'd make my job a lot easier by actually going home and taking care of yourself," he spoke with fake annoyance and Juno just met it with a happy smile.

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll get myself home.” And with a small wave of his right hand, he was out.

He had just heaved himself onto Small Fry’s back when Doc’s face appeared in the window and called out for him. “Oh and Juno? If you find out the name and address of the person who stitched you up, please let me know. I have a job offer to extend to them.”

Juno’s stomach flipped at the words. He doubted that he would ever see the thief again. And if he did, it probably wouldn’t be in a way where Juno could extend the offer, but he let himself hope, just for a small moment, and maybe that hope hurt more than it would to see the thief hang, but that was something that Juno could think about another day.

“Will do, Doc. You’ll be the first to know,” And after those words he took off, guiding Small Fry to the small hut that he called his own.

It wasn’t big, it was one of the smallest houses around here actually, but it was comfortable. There wasn’t a need for multiple bedrooms, he was alone, so it had seemed foolish to consider a house with more than the necessary bedroom when he had bought it.

The one important thing was that there was a very small addition to the house, big enough for him to bring Small Fry into, before taking off her bridle and trying his best to lift off the saddle with his one arm.

It didn’t really work, the saddle was too heavy for him to properly pull off without dropping it to the floor. So he just made do, pushing it into one corner, so that he didn’t have to worry about Small Fry stepping on it in the night.

He filled up her water and food buckets before stroking her face with

a gentle hand. “You’re a good horse. Thank you,” He didn’t really know what else to add, so he just pressed his forehead against her and inhaled before pushing off and going inside.

As he pushed his hand into his pocket to pull out his key, his fingers brushed against a small piece of paper which had not been there before. He pulled it out carefully, the handwriting was unfamiliar, neat and careful. And after a second, he began to read:

Juno Steel,

It wasn’t the best of circumstances but I am still happy to have made your acquaintance. I hope you actually go see a real physician when you get back into town. I am not the handiest with needle and thread but I made do.

I should thank you, not everyone would have let me go, even under the circumstances of our meeting. So I thank you, Juno, for your cooperation.

I hope I didn’t see the last of you, your face is too pretty to only be seen once.

Your better half,

Peter Nureyev

The small piece of paper almost fell out of Juno’s hands. The thief - no - Peter Nureyev had given him his name. He wasn’t sure, of course, if it was his real name, but a tiny part of him wanted to believe that it was, that Peter deemed him special enough to actually share his name with him. To tell him who he was, to let him in.

But Juno didn't know what to do with this information, to all of his knowledge, Peter was far off and gone, probably never going to return if he could help it.

Peter had also said that he wished to see Juno again, which made Juno's heart warm up in a way that he didn't expect it to. He didn't want to think about the thief and his voice, and his hands, and that scent.

That damn scent that was still clinging to his jacket like a wine stain on a shirt. He didn't hate the smell, but what he hated was the fact that it might fade one day. That one day he wouldn't get to smell it again. It scared him, for a reason that Juno could not explain.

A reason that Juno did not want to think about.

A reason that Juno did not want to name.

Naming it might make it real.

And Juno did not want it to be real. Not when it was unachievable.

So he did what he deemed fit, he pushed the note back into his pocket, pulling out his key and stepped inside the familiar emptiness of his home.

Like most days, the emptiness settled deep within his bones, filling him with the familiar feeling of being alone. But this was the first time that he felt lonely. A change that should have been subtle, but it felt like it was determining his entire being.

But Juno Steel was a person who had mastered the art of ignoring his problems, so he just carried himself to his bed that was too empty for his liking, but he didn't feel like working on changing that particular fact of his life, and he lowered himself, before pulling not just his, but also the thief's blanket over himself.

If he fell asleep clutching a small piece of paper that he had absent-mindedly taken from his coat pocket, then he didn't tell.

When Juno woke up in the morning, he felt better. Not good, but definitely better. His hand felt the smooth paper against his skin and in an almost childish huff, he placed it on the nightstand next to his bed.

It didn't mean anything. It was just a scribbled message with a fake name attached to it. There was no point in Nureyev telling him his real name, he had no reason to.

"Of course, I do, but it would take someone really special for me to ever tell it, especially now."

The words flew around in his head like flies over a rotten carcass. Special. He rolled that word around in his head, turning it over and examining it from all angles. Juno didn't remember if anyone had ever called him special. At least not phrased as a compliment. Normally it was used as a backhanded insult towards him and to hear it as a compliment felt strange to him, it felt different and if Juno had been just a little more honest with himself, he might have even admitted that it felt good.

Good. Juno didn't remember the last time that other people's words

had made him feel good, genuinely good, and he definitely didn't want to think about the fact that the first time it happened again it was from a nameless thief that he had let go. No, not nameless. Not anymore.

Peter Nureyev was not nameless anymore. At least not to Juno. Juno had been graced with that honour for some reason that he could not understand, but he would cherish it. Privately. He wouldn't go around and spill another person's secrets like that, so he decided to stay quiet, to hold this name so close to his chest that not even he could see it.

He made his way out of the bed slower than he wanted to, but he knew that he had to be careful. Not moving too quickly and instead, taking every step with extra care. It was agonizingly slow, but he preferred being slow to being in pain, so, he chose his battle and a battle with time was easier to win than a battle with his own body, which protested by the sheer thought of getting out of bed, but Juno had to get to the station. He had to let people know that he was alive and he would rather do it sooner than later.

A wince weaselled its way out of his mouth at the sheer thought of how angry Rita would be. It, of course, wasn't technically his fault, but that had never before saved him from Rita turning into a fury with a motherly instinct that was way too strong, considering that he was her boss.

He and Rita had been working together at the station for almost four years now, and if Juno was honest with himself, he would actually recognise that Rita was one of his closest, if not his best friend.

He didn't change his clothes before walking outside to grab Small Fry. The fear of ripping the flesh or hurting himself another way was too strong for him to actually consider taking off and pulling another shirt on, so he just picked up a clean shirt to put on when his shoulder didn't sting with every move.

The mare looked up when Juno walked into her stable, an almost disappointed huff escaping her nostrils when she saw the reins that Juno held in his hands.

“Now come on, it's not like it’s going to be that bad, also don’t you want to go say hi to Rita again? She probably has a sugar cube for you,” he tried to reason with the horse, whose ears definitely reacted to the name of his secretary. He knew that Small Fry liked her, it wasn’t a secret anymore that Rita snuck out sugar cubes to her more often than not.

So when his horse reluctantly started to move behind him, he didn’t really hold the reins, just had them lying in his hand so that he could tie her to the fence pole at the station. She wouldn’t run off, she never even made the notion of leaving him in the slightest and it soothed him, to have such a sure form of comfort in his life that he didn’t have to worry about. That wasn’t going to leave him.

Like everyone else always tended to do.

He shook his head a little, there was no point in thinking about this now, there was never a point in thinking about it that way, but, sometimes, his brain got to him before he could stop it.

Slowly, he made his way to the Sheriff’s office. With a name on his mind and a scent in his nose.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed it! Kudos and comments are like always, very appreciated!

The next chapter will be out on the **18th of May**

Matters of the Job

Chapter Notes

> Here it is! Another chapter! I hope you enjoy this one as much as I enjoyed writing it and I hope to see you soon when the next chapter comes out!
>
> I want to thank the absolutely lovely Fafsernir for betaing
> She also wrote a fic that you should check out!!!! Feeling Right

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Khan wanted to suspend Juno for at least a week. But, in the end, he only managed to keep Juno away from the Sheriff's department for about three days. Juno had blamed it on boredom, that he just couldn't waste his days away in his small hut, while he had an investigation to finish, while he had something to do, somewhere to be. But in the end, it wasn't the boredom that drove Juno to basically beg Khan to let him work. It was the loneliness.

A person can only spend so much time alone without seeing anyone, even when they normally say that they don't need anyone. In the end, they always need someone.

And it wasn't just the loneliness. Juno couldn't stop thinking about Nureyev, he couldn't stop wondering why the man had told him his name, or why he had saved him in the first place. He had no idea, and if there was one thing that Juno couldn't handle, it was not knowing something.

So, he decided to prostrate himself before Khan, to beg to be allowed back to work, just to have something to do, somewhere to be. A reason to wake up for.

He had hoped for the bank robbery to be complicated, to be confusing, to be a hard case to crack, therefore it was even more

disappointing when he went to investigate the bank on his third day back at the office and Khan had him doing paperwork for a few days until he got so annoyed with Juno that he sent him back out. They hadn't touched the crime scene, the bank had been closed for the investigation and Khan had said that they wouldn't open it until they found out who did it, so he had access to everything.

Croesus Kanagawa's body had been taken to the morgue on the day of the break-in and, ultimately, the day of his death. He had been shot in the head.

A good death, Juno had thought when he heard about it. A quick death, one that doesn't let you suffer. If Juno could pick a death for himself, he would pick a clear shot in the head, he didn't think he'd live to old age, so he didn't even consider that as an option. One death that Juno never wanted to experience was being hung. He didn't even want to imagine it, but when his mind went down that spiral he could basically feel the eyes on him. The stares of the people as the heavy rope clung to his throat, a necklace for eternity.

He would normally try to shut those thoughts out of his brain quickly, but sometimes he couldn't stop his brain from going down that spiral, going down those fears, going down those terrors of his own creation.

He took a deep breath, he wasn't here to ponder his own mortality, so he tried to get back to work.

The bank's hardwood floor was still stained with blood, mostly Croesus'. The other Kanagawa hadn't been there on that day, he had already checked in on them.

Cecil was heartbroken over the death of his father, and while Juno tried to understand what he was saying under the heavy sounds of his sobs, Casandra, his sister, had sat beside him and held him. Her eyes

had been tearstained, but it seemed that her eyes were dry of tears for now.

The only one who looked put together was Min Kanagawa, their stepmother, and late wife of Croesus. She had looked just like any other day that Juno had seen her, her black hair pulled into a tight bun, her lips in a slim, firm line. She looked like a woman who had more knives hidden on her than a centipede had legs. She was dangerous. A true snake hidden under the flowers of the desert.

To say that Juno wasn't drawn to that danger was a lie. He had always been drawn to people that could kill him without breaking a sweat. He didn't know what that said about him, but it couldn't be anything good.

Juno didn't trust Min Kanagawa, well, he didn't trust any of the Kanagawa family further than he could throw them, but Min... Min was a special piece of the puzzle. Nothing seemed to break her, she openly talked about Casandra's problem as if she was just another piece on her board of chess. Someone to be moved and played with. Someone to be sacrificed to win in the end.

But now the King of her Chessboard was dead, or at least so Juno thought.

Casandra was the one to rip Juno from his thoughts.

"Is it *really* necessary that you're still here, Juno Steel? Don't you already have enough info? Can't you leave us alone to grieve?" Her last words came out harder than the rest, rougher, her voice was less a clear sound but more a piece of sandpaper rubbing on metal. She was tired, and Juno was too. So he excused himself and started to leave, offering his condolences to Min one more time, as he walked out.

She didn't respond, and it wasn't like Juno had expected her to. He

never expected her to answer. Min Kanagawa was like a statue built out of the finest marble, she was beautiful, an art piece of a woman, but just like a statue, she was cold and hard.

Juno didn't like going to the Kanagawa bank, so when he walked out of the building, he felt his shoulders relax and he took a deep breath of the hot desert air. He didn't trust Min and he wouldn't put it past her to have her husband killed to take over the bank alone, but it wasn't like he had any proof. So he could do nothing, especially because he had limited time. Bank robbers tended to get away with it ninety per cent of the time unless the Sheriff's department showed up while they were still there. Otherwise, they were basically untraceable in the desert heat, the prints of their horses' hooves taken away by the faintest breeze.

So, Juno didn't really have any hope of finding the culprits, but he could still try. If not for the sake of finding the person that killed Croesus, then just for the distraction a new case would bring him.

He made his way over to Small Fry that he had tied to the pole over the nearby water trough and got on her as elegantly as he could with one arm still out of commission. It had been a long day, he should just take a break, like Khan had told him to. Leave the case to someone else, but he couldn't. He still needed to know why Nureyev had been there. He just needed to know. He wasn't lying to himself anymore, there was no more telling himself that he didn't care about the thief, that he wasn't intrigued by those eyes and that smile. That there wasn't something so weirdly alluring about the thief who had saved his life.

So he made his way back to the Sheriff station, he would once again work way too late and probably fall asleep on the desk and be woken up by Rita's way too happy and chipper morning voice, but losing himself in work was still better than losing himself in the faint scent of the thief that still stuck to his blanket that he was lying on his bed in his house. Everything would be better than to wallow in self-pity like Juno was one to do.

The ride to the Sheriff station was a short one, and Juno got off Small Fry close to the stables so that he could lead her into the stable quickly.

She walked into her stable almost on auto-pilot and Juno smiled to himself. In the beginning, she had been a terrible horse, but he managed to get her to cooperate. It was still one of the things that Juno was extremely proud of. Even now, a few years later, they were inseparable.

He hadn't saddled her in the morning, due to his issues with the shoulder and she had been accommodating enough, bending down so he could get on her back and being calmer in general.

Even though he kind of hated admitting it, Small Fry was one of his closest and only friends. She never asked questions and she didn't talk much and, almost more importantly than that, he couldn't mess up their friendship by saying something stupid.

Carefully, and as quickly as he could, he removed her bridle and her saddle blanket, petting her flank after he was done. Her food troth was already filled, one of his co-workers probably took pity on him and filled it, so he wouldn't have to carry the heavy buckets around and he quietly thanked whoever it was.

He left Small Fry to her oats and made his way inside the all too familiar station. How long had he worked here? Ten? Fifteen years? It was before the death of his mother, he remembered that, but he was a person who would forget his own age and birthday if people didn't keep reminding him, so remembering such an unimportant date like the day that he became a deputy didn't seem of much use to him.

The office that had been his for the last years was small, empty and messy. There were papers thrown about, old wanted posters and the records of people being paid for bringing the criminals in. The table was covered in small indentations of where he would stick his knife in if he got bored, the edge where he propped up his feet while he read a new case file was worn down, the oil that used to make the table

shine and keep it from slowly deteriorating was close to wearing off. A small wooden chair stood behind the tortured desk and it had seen better days, but after all, it was fine. It was his office and that was all that mattered. It wasn't like many people ever came in here. Sure, sometimes they brought in criminals for questioning or just for Juno to keep an eye on, if they had the feeling that they couldn't be trusted with the other ones in the holding cell, but normally only he and Rita ever ventured into this office, so he didn't really mind how messy it was.

For a short second, his brain betrayed him and wondered if Nureyev would mind his messy office. He didn't dignify that thought with any more time, just let out an annoyed breath and settled behind the desk, making sure to keep his shoulder still and his mind far from the sharp-toothed thief.

With his good arm, he pulled out the report that one of his fellow deputies had been so nice to write up after his sudden disappearance. He knew that he could always count on them, but sometimes, he wasn't really sure if they helped him because they wanted to or because they had to.

Quick eyes read over the report in record time and Juno let out a snort at the line:
And where did Deputy Steel go? Khan wants us to find him, but we don't even know where to start looking.

Once the initial amusement faded, he realised that he had been surprisingly lucky. Nureyev didn't have to save him, he didn't have to waste his time bringing him to safety and patching him up, and, quite frankly, Juno still didn't quite understand why he had done it in the first place. What was so special about him that this thief decided to save his life? How was he special enough to receive the gift of his name?

"Juno?"

He didn't hear the voice call out his name, his mind too preoccupied trying to answer the countless questions that he had, important and unimportant, case-related and not. Most of his questions were laced with the word: "Why?" Why was Nureyev at the bank? Why was the bank attacked? Why did he save him? Why could he not stop thinking about his eyes, his smile, his-

"Juno!"

He startled as he heard the voice, pushing through his thoughts and shaking him to consciousness.

Before him stood Alessandra Strong, fellow deputy and his ex-girlfriend. They hadn't dated long and it had been after, well after many things took a turn for the worse in Juno's life and she had told him that they wouldn't be able to do this anymore, and he had understood. She hadn't signed up for all of that and their relationship wasn't strong enough to survive it. So they settled on being friends and, all in all, it had been a good decision.

She was happy with Abigail, the teacher who had moved into the town last year. Happily enough, Juno had overheard Alessandra mumbling about trying to propose to her and he was genuinely happy for her. Alessandra was one of the people in his life that Juno wanted only the best for, with the amount of stuff she had gone through, she deserved to be happy. Truly happy.

"Yeah? What's wrong?" He responded, his mind finally snapping out of his thoughts.

"Are you going to stay here all night again? You should be resting and not pulling an all-nighter that will in the end just make you fall asleep at your desk in a position that will kill your back all day tomorrow," she said, her annoyance laced with actual concern that Juno could only pick out because he knew her so well.

“It’s not going to kill my back,” he argued and she only raised an eyebrow. “It’s not, even if it would, how would you know?”

“Maybe because you tend to complain about it all day? Maybe because you’re grouchy when you have back issues and I’m the one that has to listen to Rita’s rambling about how, if you just took better care of yourself, you wouldn’t have to suffer?” She explained calmly and Juno looked away, knowing full and well that she was right, but just because she was right didn’t mean that he would have to give her the satisfaction of agreeing with her.

“Bold of you to assume that Rita doesn’t complain about me to my face,” he said instead and he could feel Alessandra’s look on him soften.

“Just-” she let out a soft sigh, “Promise me to not sleep on your bad shoulder, okay? And eat something, Abby has been saying that you looked thinner last time she saw you. I don’t really tend to notice, because I see you every day, but you know how she is.”

“Yeah, I know. I will, I promise you,” he said and he meant it. He didn’t like disappointing the few friends that he still had in this town.

They stood in silence for a while, until they both started speaking at the same time.

“I should really head out.”

“How’re things with Abigail?” He asked, hoping to keep his mind from the case, from Min Kanagawa, from Nureyev for just a bit longer.

“Things are going well, really well. She still can’t believe that we found each other again, so many years after we served together, you

know?" she smiled out, it was a careful smile, but a happy one. A smile that said that she would protect the source and reason for that smile with everything at her disposal and Juno knew that she would. She was strong enough, fierce enough. Hell, sometimes he had the feeling that she could snap him in half like a twig if she really wanted to.

"I'm glad that you found each other. You're good for each other," he spoke honestly and he hoped that his smile could convey his happiness.

She gave a quiet smile and nod in thanks before she repeated her point from earlier about having to leave.

"Say Hi to Abby for me and have a good night."

"I will, thank you, Juno. Don't overwork yourself."

He almost threw an "I can't promise anything," after her, but he knew that it wouldn't be good. She would just fuss over him again and he didn't need that. He got enough of that from Rita every day.

So, he just pulled out his notebook, the case report and a small lamp and started writing. Trying to twist the things that happened in his mind, examining them from all angles.

Why the bank had been targeted was an easy one, banks are always a hotspot for criminal activity. No matter how much security they have. Was it coincidence that they attacked on one of the days that Croesus was there or was that part of their plan? He wasn't always there, almost never actually. Croesus Kanagawa would only bless the people of Hyperion City with his presence once or twice a month and normally never without Min. But she had said that she hadn't been there. A business appointment, she had said. Juno didn't believe it,

but he couldn't really attack one of the most powerful women without an actual reason or proof, so he tried to think of other options first.

Cecil? No, he seemed too busy crying about his father. Could have been a trick, of course, but Juno had known Cecil long enough to know when his tears were for show and when they were real.

Cassandra? She seemed out of the question as well. Croesus had always tried his best to make everything possible for her. So he doubted that it would be her.

Was it Min? Did she schedule the bank robbery to get rid of her husband, to gain control and access to all of the money and the investments? Or was it plain coincidence? Had she been accidentally out of town when they had attacked?

Was this all just a giant dustball of coincidences that kept growing bigger and bigger?

Juno didn't let his head hit the cold wood of his desk as he sighed in annoyance. There was probably no point in actually investigating all of this. He didn't even know the gang that had attacked the bank. They had all worn deep green bandanas that had covered up their faces. Most gangs did that, but normally they didn't have a specific colour or the same fabric. Normally they were ragtag groups of outlaws that worked together, but these people? They had seemed organised.

And there had been many of them, he had known that he didn't stand a chance against them as soon as he had arrived at the scene, but it was still his job to try. So he had, and the only thing he got out of it was a fucked up shoulder and a name.

Upon thinking about Nureyev, Juno let out another long sigh.

He didn't understand the man, he was as much an enigma as he was attractive.

Juno wanted to punch himself as that thought crossed his mind, there was no point in thinking Nureyev was attractive, he would never see him again and that would be the end of it. He would die one day in a gunfight and Peter Nureyev's scent will hopefully not follow him to the last moments that he would spend on this earth.

But, he wasn't close to dying yet, and so he allowed the thief to take up his mind again, as he stood up and crossed over to the cupboard with all their wanted posters. He pulled out a thick stack and started looking through them. Examining them one by one to see if they struck him as maybe another alias of the man.

Maybe he would recognise those eyes, that smile, the earring.

Even if he did, it wasn't like the sketches would do the man any justice. Juno knew that, but he still took this time, his office lit by the small oil lamp on his desk and hundreds of posters to look through.

When the first slivers of dawn shone through the window, illuminating the dust particles that moved around in the air, the worn-down floor and furniture, Juno Steel had found four different posters that he had the suspicion of being Nureyev.

Those four posters were safely tucked under Juno's sleeping form, the beams of sunlight reflecting off the slightest bit of drool that was running out of his mouth.

The neat piles of posters that laid on his desk were organised in three piles.

“Definitely not Nureyev, Could be Nureyev and I know that’s Nureyev”

On the definitely not Nureyev stack were the most papers, holding famous criminal names like Jet Siquiliak, Jake Takano and the renowned serial killer that everyone just called “The Proctor”.

Juno had ever met any of these people himself, but he had heard stories. He had heard of the scheming and the money laundering that Jack Takano had gotten up to, way before Juno was even born.

The stories of the famous Highwayman Jet Siquiliak were still used to strike fear into new deputies and sheriffs, even though they hadn’t had a case that could be in any way linked to the man for years.

The Proctor, he had met, and he was one of the only big names in that pile that they had actually managed to arrest. She had been a vile human being, killing those that failed at her tests but, in the end, Juno had gotten to her first. It had been one of the first cases where no one had interfered with his methods and he had been proud when he had brought her to justice.

The “Maybe Nureyev Pile” had two posters in it. A man called Duke Rose, twenty thousand credits on his name for stealing multiple artefacts that had still not shown up again, at least not to Juno’s knowledge. The other name was Christopher Morales. He really wasn’t sure with this one.

The poster itself showed a man in a suit, sharp cheekbones, piercing eyes and a smile that was so sharp you could cut yourself on it, if you

just looked at it. All in all, it fit Nureyev perfectly. But there was something about it, something that he couldn't perfectly pinpoint. It was enough for him to doubt himself, so he wasn't going to pin that one on Nureyev.

The "Definitely Nureyev" pile was only Perseus Shah and Rex Glass. Two that he had complete confirmation from the man himself.

There was no real reason on why Juno had spent his entire night looking through old wanted posters, but something in his brain tugged at him to know, to find out more about this man, that he just needed to know. The reason why he had to know eluded him, but Juno wasn't going to let go of an opportunity for something actually really interesting to happen.

He shifted in his sleep, and moved his arms, it stung but not enough to actually wake him. What woke him, in the end, was the voice of Omar Khan.

"STEEL, I'LL SEE YOU IN MY OFFICE IN TWO MINUTES," he screamed at what sounded like the top of his lungs and Juno lunged upwards, almost falling out of his chair. There wasn't even time for him to let out a surprised yelp as he hissed in pain from the sudden movement.

Getting up was harder than Juno had expected, every single one of his joints protesting the action with loud sounds as he winced in pain. Alessandra had told him that it was a bad idea, but he didn't want to believe it and now he had multiple kinks in his back to prove that he should have listened to her.

Even through the pain, he got up and slowly made his way towards Khan's office. This shouldn't be too bad.

“YOU’RE SUSPENDING ME?” He let out, a lot louder than he had wanted to, but his anger fueled his voice that had still been sleep laced a few seconds ago.

Khan sighed and massaged his forehead with one hand, not looking at Juno. “Only until you’re better, Juno. You’re overworking yourself. I had told you to stay out of all of this and you didn’t want to and now I need to make the hard and reasonable decisions for you,” his eyes moved upwards to meet Juno’s and Juno pressed down the urge to punch him in the face. “Juno, you were almost fatally injured on duty and then you were gone for two days. Two days. We had already written you off, I don’t want to actually have to do that. So please. Go home, take care of yourself.”

When he saw the mixture of disappointment and anger in Juno’s eyes, he let out a long breath. “Your badge, Juno. Give me your badge,” Juno didn’t move to grab it. “I promise you that you will get it back when you’re back on your feet again, but until I deem you healthy enough to work, you are staying home.”

Juno wanted to scoff into Khan’s face, but their relationship was already tainted, so he just looked straight into Khan’s eyes and took off his badge with his injured arm. He didn’t really know why he did that, all he knew was that it stung like hell, but he didn’t let it show. Not to Khan.

“Thank you, Juno, for being reasonable.” His sheriff stood up in front of him and Juno noticed once again how tall Khan was. “Rita has already said that she is going to bring you home. She doesn’t want to leave Cassidy with you, while you are injured.”

Juno had the feeling that he needed to scream, but instead, he just let out an angry: “Her name is Small Fry, not Cassidy.”

Khan sighed again and nodded. “Right, Small Fry was the name you were so intent on calling her. Sorry, I just tend to forget. Anyway, Small *Fry* is staying here.”

Juno wanted to protest, to scream, to be angry, but he was just tired, so he simply nodded, to Khan’s surprise.

“Well, Juno. Rita is waiting outside for you, stay healthy and safe,” Khan spoke with something close to care in his voice.

Juno’s first thought was *“Don’t tell me what to do,”* but he didn’t want to start another fight, so he just turned on his heels and walked out. Out of the office, out of the station, until he saw his Secretary, standing at the street corner, waving excitedly.

He made his way over slowly, to make sure that she knew that he wasn’t happy about it.

It was going to be a long while before he could come back to the station, but first, it was going to be a long way home.

“Mistah Steel, you don’t get it. The Scorpion and The Tarantula are metaphors! Because they reflect the relationship that those animals have in the wild, always preying on each other and, get this, Boss! In the end, the Scorpion even tells the Tarantula that he was happy to have fallen into his net even though that doesn’t really make sense, because tarantulas don’t actually spin webs, but I think that was a fault on the author's part, even if they live down here in the desert like we do, then they should know. But, it's not really important

because, the entire time of the story, you see these two as enemies, but you can also see them moving closer together-”

That was the moment that Juno zoned out. As much as he loved Rita, which was a thing he would never tell her in person, her getting her hands on a cheesy romance novel that she hadn’t read yet was the worst. She wouldn't stop talking until she had explained the entire plot at least twice. So it went without saying that Juno knew the stories from a lot of books that he himself had never read.

He couldn’t even blame Rita. He enjoyed listening to her talk, but today it was just too much, so when he saw the familiar shape of his small house in the distance, he almost let out a sigh of relief.

Trying to soak up as much of Rita’s rambling as possible, while also desperately trying to protect his brain from a headache, he started walking faster, not noticeably, but just a little.

His desk wasn’t as good of a sleeping surface as he had expected it to be and his entire body ached. He could hear the siren call of his bed all the way from here.

“I really wanted to see if that author has more books because I just really liked them, Boss, there was something dangerous about a book- Oh, there we go, brought you all the way home. See? It wasn’t that bad, Mistah Steel, and I will come by and bring you some food in a few days and check up on you and OH OH! You could read some of the books that I’ve been reading. They’re about this love story but they are-”

Juno just put a hand up and she seemed to quiet down. “Thanks, Rita, for everything, but my body is tired from healing and I just want to sleep.”

She nodded enthusiastically. “Sure thing, Boss! I’ll come back soon! Take care of yourself and don’t move too much, alright?!”

Juno only nodded and opened his door. “I promise, Rita.”

She gave him a calculating look. “Pinky promise?”

He managed to hold back his sigh as he, too, raised his finger and interlaced it with hers. “Pinky promise.”

That seemed to calm the woman down, and with a giant grin, she turned around. “See you soon!”

Juno raised his hand in response and walked inside, trapping the hot summer sun outside. His right hand instinctively went up to his face and he rubbed his eyes, before yawning loudly.

As he moved towards his bedroom to sleep, though, he heard a knock on the door.

“Rita, I told you to come back later, not immediately. I really need to sleep, do you-” he stopped himself as he opened the door to a person that was very much not Rita. There wasn’t really a way to describe how not-Rita this person was.

Jagged teeth protruded out of the confinement of the woman’s lips, so far that they went past her nose, her skin webbed with thick scars and, as Juno looked closely, he could see that she was missing an ear.

“Excuse me, are you Juno Steel?” The woman spoke and Juno felt a shiver run up his spine.

“Yeah, who wants to know?” he answered cockily, even though he knew that he shouldn’t.

“Really not a question I feel like answering,” the woman mumbled and Juno saw the walking stick, that he could have sworn hadn’t been there two seconds ago, move towards his head and, before he could react, terrible pain hit his temple and the next thing he knew was that his vision was blurring more and more, before he felt himself fall backwards.

He didn’t feel the pain of the impact, because he was unconscious before he hit the ground.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!
Please let me know what you think!
The next chapter is going to be a bit later, because uni is killing me, but the **Next Chapter will be out on the 22nd of May!** and after that, it will be rapid-fire posting, but I haven't gotten around to editing the next chapter

The Twisting Hands of Lady Fate

Chapter Notes

OOHH CHAPTER 5!!
I want to quickly give a **Content Warning**
There are tags for Graphic Descriptions of Violence and Torture and they do show in this chapter. It's not really that graphic, but I want to tell you before you start reading.
It's mostly medical care. So, if you are uncomfortable with any of these things, do not worry. I will post a summary in the notes in the bottom, just a small thing, basically only a few words on what you would miss.
I do not go into great detail, but it's just something that I want you to be aware of.

If you do not want to read these things, I would suggest that you stop reading at the line.
I hope you are all alright!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Juno gained consciousness again, he was sat on the back of a horse, a burlap sack over his head and his hands tied uncomfortably behind his back. He wasn't sure how long he had been out, but it must have been a while, considering how much his shoulder stung and how hot it had gotten. It had been around seven in the morning when he had arrived at his house with Rita and now, with how hot the sun was shining he was guessing that it had to be at least nine.

He wanted to hit himself, he should have been more careful. He should have known that there was danger everywhere around him, he was a deputy for fuck's sake, but at the same time, he couldn't have known. So here he was, tied up, a rope around his stomach, pulling him tight to the person's back in front of him. He was so close that he could smell the sweat that was clinging to his captors' clothing, he could feel the little pieces of sand flowing into his lungs with every breath.

They were riding in a soft canter. The motions of the horse were so different from Small Fry's that it only put emphasis on the strangeness and danger of the situation.

He was probably going to die wherever this person might take him, there was no other reason for them bringing him out here than to make it possible to put him through a long, painful death. Maybe they were going to bury him alive, only his head sticking out, or maybe they would hang him.

Or, maybe, a small part of his brain supplied, maybe they didn't want to kill him, maybe they wanted much worse from him, but for the life of him, he couldn't think of a single possible thing that a person might want from him.

He was stuck in his own brain for a while, trying not to think of all the terrible things that they might do to him, but his brain always strayed back towards those thoughts. So he closed his eyes, took a deep breath and tried to focus on the sounds around him until the horse suddenly slowed to a walking speed.

Wherever this person wanted to take him, Juno had the feeling that they had just arrived.

His suspicions were confirmed only a few seconds later when he felt the vibrations of the woman's deep voice in his chest that was still pressed up against her back.

"Finding him was a lot easier than we thought," she exclaimed loudly and Juno wanted to headbutt her, but he decided against it.

There was a voice that answered the woman, but Juno couldn't make

out what they said over the woman's loud laughter.

He only heard her response and if he hadn't been gagged, he would have said something against it. "Yeah, they are really depriving some village of this idiot."

Juno sighed around the cloth in his mouth and didn't even respond. He deserved it, he had been stupid. There was no reason to deny it.

He felt the rope around him loosen as the woman untied it and only a few seconds later, the support that he had in the shape of her back was gone as he felt her jump off the horse with a loud thump.

"Get him off and put him with the other one, I need to talk to the Boss," the woman said and Juno heard her feet go further and further away and he let out a small breath in relief. But his relief only lasted a few seconds, until he felt two pairs of arms that grabbed his shoulders and pulled him off the horse. As they grabbed his left shoulder, he released a short yelp of pain, but there was no reaction from the two people that were half leading, half pulling him away.

As he heard the sound of a door creaking open, he felt the heat of the sun leaving his body and it got dark in his burlap sack. He didn't know where he was, but he was sure that this was going to be his grave. He was sure that it was here, that his organs would give up, or that he would get shot in the head or killed in any other way imaginable.

This was going to be his grave and he didn't even mind. The only thing that really bothered him in that moment of realisation was that there was no other person to take care of Small Fry, but he knew that they would find someone.

He was ripped out of his thoughts as one of the people suddenly got smaller and he stumbled as he took the first step of a staircase.

So he stumbled after the two men who were still holding him by his arms and Juno knew that they were the only reason why he was still standing upright. The temperature changed drastically once they reached the end of the stairs, the air becoming cold and damp. It smelt of some kind of mold, wet dirt and stone.

A basement.

Juno couldn't help but let out a sigh, he really didn't want to meet his end in a cold and clammy basement, but if that was what the world had planned for him, then he just had to accept it.

The guards suddenly stopped and he heard the rattling of keys, then the squeaking of a door being opened and, before he could assess anything else, the ties on his hands were cut, the bag was being pulled from his head and he was pushed inside the room with a force that was really unnecessary.

He barely caught himself, before turning back to the closing door, that cut out the entire light from the lantern in the hallway and left him standing in the dark, with only the slightest bit of light coming in through the cracks of the door. He untied the gag in his mouth with his right arm, before he let his forehead fall against the door and he let out an angry sigh.

He turned back towards the dark room slowly, trying to get his eyes to adjust, but he could barely make anything out.

"If they had told me that I would be getting kidnapped twice within a month when I started this job I wouldn't have taken it," he mumbled

out while scanning the room for anything that his eyes were able to make out.

“Now, I really wouldn’t say that I kidnapped you, Juno,” he heard a voice say from a dark corner and Juno knew that voice. He might have only heard it once, but it was ingrained in his memory, like a brand on cattle.

Peter Nureyev.

“Well, how would you call taking someone that is unconscious and bringing them to a different location?” he bit back, but he couldn’t help his heart from being just a little lighter. At least he wasn’t alone.

“Oh, no, I would still definitely say that it wasn’t morally right from me to do so, but I wanted to call it Deputy-napping or something. You are definitely not a kid anymore,” the thief said and Juno couldn’t hold back the smile that formed on his face and, for a moment, he was glad that there was no light down here, because he really didn’t need the other to know how happy he was to hear his voice.

“So, any clue why the fuck we’re here?” he asked instead of telling the other, his happiness was best kept inside. Juno had learned that it was way too easily stolen from you otherwise.

“Absolutely no clue, Deputy. But there must be some kind of reason, right? I don’t think it was a coincidence that they found both of us and brought us here.”

Juno walked closer to the other man’s voice, trying to find him.

“But no one knows that I know you, or that you know me,” Juno pointed out and he just heard the man make a sound of agreement, then the telltale sound of a lighter before the brightness of the small

flame hit his eyes.

“Good point, so there is absolutely no reason for this, but the sheer force of coincidence, Juno.”

There he was. Peter Nureyev. Illuminated by the small flame in his hand. The fire reflecting in his eyes and on his hair. The cheekbones were more defined than last time.

“He lost weight” His brain supplied helpfully and Juno hated himself for the small sinking feeling that he felt at the thought of Peter going without food. Hell, he didn’t know how long the man had been down here. Maybe whatever sick fuck had kidnapped him, was starving them down here.

But maybe it was also just the light of the fire, maybe it was just the flame that bathed the man in light from an angle that made him look so much thinner.

Juno watched as the flame of the lighter moved and he had to squint when the thief lit the lantern that Juno could now see in the dim light of the lighter.

As the room was lit, he took a moment to look around. There wasn’t much here but two pallets that passed as beds on the floor. There was moisture on the stone walls and Juno shivered at the sheer thought of how cold it would be at night down here.

There were no windows and only two doors lined this room. Before he could ask, Nureyev followed his line of sight and mentioned “Bathroom.” Juno only nodded with understanding.

“So, Juno, how has life been treating you since we last saw each other?” Nureyev asked calmly with a smile on his face. A smile that Juno had seen only a few times, not very long ago, but he noticed that, when he saw that man smile, he had missed it.

Juno almost had to laugh at that. His voice was so calm, so collected. So unbothered, as if they were back in that cave, safe and sound.

But they weren’t. There was no fire between them, no quick-witted sentences. There were no horses tied up outside and no bedrolls. There were no card games and no questions.

There was only them and the stench of a basement so damp that it might have mold in some places. Only them and the fear of what these people would do to them. Only them and the iron smell of dried blood in the air.

In the end, if Juno took out all the things that made him uncomfortable in this room, it left only them.

Juno Steel and Peter Nureyev. A Deputy and a Thief in the cave of a beast that they didn’t even know.

And, for a second, just the smallest sliver of a second his heart calmed. At least he wasn’t going to die alone. That would be the only thing that could make this worse. Dying alone.

“Life has been treating me alright, Nureyev.” He could see the men’s eyes light up at his name. “How’s it been treating you, that we have both ended up in this shithole of a place?”

A grin formed on the thief’s face and Juno’s heart latched onto it. It was a thing that was similar, be it outside of this situation, or in this

situation. Peter Nureyev's grin had the same cocky air to it, the same weird feeling of care.

"Well, Juno, I hate to say that it hasn't been treating me as kindly as I would have wanted it to, but I made due."

"You look thinner than last time," Juno breathed out without wanting to. He let it slip and he saw the man's face twist in confusion before his face turned to something that Juno could only call fear, despair, or something along those lines.

"Food on the road can get slim sometimes, it's not a problem. You look healthier than the last time I saw you. Shoulder still giving you trouble?"

Juno shook his head and walked closer, sitting down on the pallet that Nureyev hadn't claimed. "Not really, it's healing nicely. Thanks to you," he noticed the softness that his voice adopted in the last few words. He tried to banish it, but there was no luck. "Doc said you should stop by, said he could make a great physician out of you if you'd be willing."

Nureyev just raised one of his dark eyebrows at him. "Me? A doctor? Juno please, we both know that that isn't really my forte-"

"I don't, actually," Juno interrupted. "I only know that you are a thief, selfless enough to save someone from the other side from certain death. I think that is basically one of the main things doctors do, right? Save people no matter their moral code and beliefs? Or have I gotten that wrong?"

Nureyev got quiet, and Juno tapped himself on the shoulder for pinning the thief like that, perfectly figuring him out. At least in that

small aspect. It wasn't not like he suddenly knew Nureyev, not really, but he had the feeling that that was going to change soon. He doubted that either of them was going to get out of here soon.

Juno looked over at the man and, with a careful smile, a smile that was used to hide his fear and his doubt of getting out of here alive and the fact that he still didn't know why they were here, with that smile, he asked: "Who do you think imprisoned us here?"

Nureyev only met his eyes with a smile so eerily similar to his own, that it made a shiver run up his spine. "I don't know, but I have the feeling we are going to find out soon."

His feelings had been correct. After a few hours of conversation that was mainly based on how they both got here and worrying about what was to come, the door to their room opened.

The lantern from the hallway cast the person standing in the hallway in a dark shadow, only a few flickers of light reaching their figure, but Juno knew who it was. The woman who had taken him this morning. It was her. There was not a single doubt about it, he could practically taste her presence, her scent a mixture of sweat and blood. Blood that was definitely not her own.

"Rose, get up," her voice was colder than the nights in the desert and their unrelenting dark sky above, endless and vast and so, so empty.

Juno shot Nureyev a look as he watched the man stand up. He dusted off his clothing and, as he walked to the woman, he looked at Juno. Just for a second but, in that small second that belonged to only them, he smiled and winked at the deputy and Juno was grateful for the bad

lighting in the room, because he felt his ears getting warm.

Nureyev was an attractive man, Juno had known that from the start, but he hadn't expected that the man would have such a big effect on him, so he just smiled back as he watched Nureyev walk towards that woman. It felt tense, as if there was something there that Juno couldn't see and couldn't understand just yet. For some reason, the scene reminded him of a cow being lead to slaughter.

The thought settled deep into Juno's bones and, for a second, a traitorous second, he wanted to jump up and do something, but there was a hint of something in Peter's walk. Confidence, maybe? Or was it just complete determination? Juno didn't know, but it made him reconsider, made him wonder if he shouldn't just wait and see how this would pan out.

And so he did, he didn't get up as Nureyev was shackled and led away, he didn't get up when he saw the grin on the woman's face, and he didn't get up when the door closed behind them, a heavy lock falling against the door, locking him in.

He did get up though when he heard footsteps walking away from their door. Whatever this was, he had a higher chance of being able to hear what was happening if he was at the door.

"So, where are we going? You're going to give me a tour?" he heard Nureyev's cocky voice and he could imagine the smirk that he was wearing with that voice.

"Now come on, you can tell m-" he started again, but he was cut off by a yelp of pain that made Juno's hairs stand.

"Shut your mouth or I will break every single one of your fingers so

often that you will never be able to pick up a glass again, you hear me?" the voice of the woman carried further than Nureyev's. There was something in it, a danger that made Juno deeply uncomfortable. He would avoid all contact with that woman as much as he possibly could.

A door opened and then he heard the last comprehensible words from Peter Nureyev.

"Long time, no see, Miasma."

He heard the door shut with an audible thump and the conversation behind it was drowned out completely. But Juno couldn't get over the way that Nureyev had said those words. There had been a fear laced in those words that was so obvious that Juno had the feeling that he could have grabbed it and pulled it towards him to inspect it. He couldn't, though. Peter wasn't here and Juno was stuck in a room that was too silent, waiting for any sign of life from the thief.

Anything at all.

He let himself slide down, his back against the door, his fingers fiddling with the shirt that he was wearing.

It was too quiet. He couldn't hear distance murmuring or conversation. He couldn't even hear footsteps.

It was all too quiet, so quiet that the only thing that he could hear was his heartbeat, his breathing, the shifting of his clothes against the cold, damp wood of the door.

It was all too quiet, until it suddenly wasn't.

A scream ripped through the quiet, like a knife would rip through a shirt, the cotton bending to the will of the blade, with no chance to protect itself.

A scream ripped through the quietness and Juno stood in less than a second. He knew it had been Peter, there was no other voice that he had ever heard that sounded like his.

There was no second doubt in his mind that the person who was screaming in pain and in agony was Peter Nureyev, the man who had saved his life. It killed him to hear the voice that had only ever been an odd source of reassurance be broken by his screams.

Juno lifted his right arm and started hitting the door, punching it, shaking it. Trying anything to get it to open.

"LET ME OUT!" he screamed, his voice so desperate, so distant that he almost didn't recognise it, but even before he screamed, he knew that no one would come to his aid. No one would release him so that he could save Peter from harm. No one was going to come and take pity on him.

He was alone and he would stay alone, listening to the screams of a man he didn't even really know. A man who had been so selfless, so compassionate that he had saved Juno's life without a second of hesitation.

And now, he was standing in a cold basement, his fist punched raw from knocking against the door, the hair on his arms standing upwards.

He knew that it wasn't going to stop for a while, he knew that he could do nothing against it. He was stuck, like a mouse in a trap, his head under the metal, clinging to a life that didn't even want him.

As the long minutes passed, he noticed that he couldn't keep listening. He noticed how he started to shake and how his breathing turned ragged. So that was the first thing he focused on. His breathing.

He took a deep breath in, and his eyes flinched as Nureyev screamed again as he held his breath, before slowly releasing it.

He was going to be of no help to Nureyev if he came to the cell and found Juno stuck in a panic attack. So he kept breathing, slowly, deliberately. Making sure to count the seconds when he inhaled and when he exhaled...

The next thing he focused on were his hand, his fingernails slowly pushing into the flesh, not enough to break the skin, but enough to hurt, to pull his focus towards them.

While he did so, he kept breathing, before he started to become aware of the wood against his back, he felt iron hinges and the cold of the wood itself bore into his back.

Another scream, another thought, another anchor to reality.

He could feel his nails forming small crescent moon shaped wounds in the balls of his hands and he wondered how long he would have to endure this, to endure the screaming without being able to help.

How long would it take him to die?

He knew that those weren't the most positive thoughts, but Juno had never been good at being positive, so he didn't pretend to be now.

Juno Steel was stuck in a basement, listening to the man who had saved his life screaming in pain and his only thought was "When am I going to be allowed to die?"

The short answer to that question was that he didn't know. What he did know, though, or at least had the feeling of, was the fact that whoever had them was not willing to let them go again. Juno was going to die here, in this cold, clammy basement and that thought scared him less than he wanted to admit.

But that all brought him to another question. Nureyev obviously seemed to know the person in the other room, but Juno still wasn't sure why he was here. He didn't know what he could have done to deserve this treatment, and he didn't have the energy to fight back either.

So he tried to listen to his breathing, listen to his heartbeat, listen to anything other than the thief screaming for his life.

Juno started counting the seconds, then the minutes. Anything to keep himself distracted.

But counting the seconds and the minutes also meant that he knew exactly when it all stopped. Twenty-eight minutes and thirty-three seconds after he started counting, he heard Nureyev stop screaming and his mind assumed the worst. The man must have died. Juno had been so happy to not be alone, it wasn't something that he was used to, not being alone. And without a second thought, his brain was sure that the man had died.

He almost shed a tear for the mysterious man that he knew so little about, a tear for his saviour. A tear for someone that Juno had the feeling he could have called his friend.

He was sure that the man was dead until he heard the door down the hall unlock. He got to his feet, moving backwards and standing in front of the door, expecting it to open any second now.

His ears picked up on the slightest sound of dragging. Leather against wood. Dragging and footsteps that were getting closer and closer until he heard them stop in front of his door. The lock was loud when the person on the other side opened it, unlocking it with a loud click and Juno wasn't sure what was going to happen when that door would fall open.

So he took a deep breath and braced himself for anything.

Or so he thought.

He had not prepared for the door to open, two men holding Nureyev up by his arms, dragging him over the floor.

His shirt was off and Juno could see small cuts and burns on his chest, some deep enough to spill small pools of blood onto the man's skin, enough blood that it dripped to the floor and Juno couldn't help but stare at the drops of blood that pooled at the man's feet.

It wasn't a lot of blood. It was just enough to make an audible little *drip* noise as it fell.

Juno's breath caught in his throat at the sight of the blood. He wasn't good with it, he knew that but he also knew that Nureyev needed him more right now, so he couldn't let himself fall. He had to stay aware.

The men holding Nureyev walked in and let the man fall, it wasn't from very high up, but Juno could hear a quiet hiss of pain as the man hit the cold wooden floor and he was next to him almost immediately.

The ones who delivered the broken form of the thief were moving onwards to the door and Juno heard more than saw that they dropped something on the floor next to the door before they left.

"Nureyev?" Juno spoke, his voice soft and careful, as to not spook the other man.

He heard a groan, muffled by the fact that the face of the other man was faced towards the ground.

"I'm gonna turn you over, okay?" he mumbled, and before he could even get a reaction, he took the man's shoulders into his hands and turned him over. It was harder than he expected it to be with his shoulder, but he made do.

Seeing the wounds like this, Nureyev laying under his gaze, the only sign of life being the blood flowing out of him and his short breaths, Juno wanted to scream and to fight, but he knew that he couldn't. He knew that there was no time for that.

He dared to look away from Nureyev to see what the men had dropped at the door and he saw a small bag that seemed eerily familiar.

It was a first aid kit, the same type and model that they had at the station. His feet carried him over to it swiftly, grabbing it with determined hands, he knew how to do this. He had done this many times, even though he didn't like to see blood, didn't mean that he didn't have to once in a while.

Peter groaned again and Juno was next to him in seconds, opening the first aid kit with quick fingers and he took a deep breath.

"Nureyev, come on now, stay awake," he said loud enough to hopefully break through the fog cloud that blood loss can put on a person's mind.

"I don't wanna," he heard the thief mumble and Juno caught himself smiling, just a little small sad smile. He could do this, he knew he could, he just needed to keep the thief awake and his thoughts from coming back. He could do this.

He took a deep breath as he picked up the needle and the thread and moved to Peter's stomach to sew the biggest cut close. He moved over carefully, trying his best not to look at all the blood, but he would have to.

So he sat down next to the body of the thief, the well stocked first aid kid in his hands. It worried him that it was well stocked, that they had given them disinfectants and enough bandages to dress hundreds of wounds. It made Juno think about the possibility of them wanting to keep Peter and Juno alive for as long as possible, which was a thought that terrified him just as much as it took a weight off his shoulders.

But that wasn't what he had to think about, he had to focus on Peter, now.

He raised the disinfectant, putting some on a bandaid to clean the wound. Just before he pressed the soaked fabric to Peter's wound, he remembered that it would be easier if the thief had a distraction. So he started speaking.

"So how'd you get your horse?" Juno asked, trying to hide the desperation in his voice. He needed the thief to stay awake and distracted. At least, that was what he had always heard: until the bleeding has been stopped, don't let them fall asleep.

"That's a weird question to ask, Juno," Nureyev answered, his voice broken by a hiss of pain as Juno carefully cleaned the wounds on his stomach and chest.

"I'd just like to know," the deputy replied and Peter smiled through the pain.

"Alright, well. My horse is called Ruby, you might know her as the Ruby 7," Juno could hear the smug smile on the man's face and he smiled to himself for a second. To know that he could still be smug even in his condition calmed Juno a little.

And then it hit him. "Ruby 7? Like, the fastest horse in the West?" he asked, disbelief on his tongue. "I don't believe you."

"Well, you should, because it's the truth. Took her right from the other man's hands. Wasn't even hard."

Juno was working slowly, trying to make sure that he got all the little cuts, before he moved upwards. "So who did you steal her from?" he asked, the interest in his voice genuine.

“Have you ever heard the name Jet Siquiliak?”

Juno snorted. Had he heard the name Jet Siquiliak? Of course he had, he was only the most famous thief and murderer in all of the country.

“No, Peter, I’ve never heard of him, care to enlighten me?” he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

“Really? I’m surprised, he is quite famous-” the thief seemed like he wanted to go on, but Juno interrupted him, a worried smile on his face.

“No, Peter. I’ve heard of him. I was making a joke.” Juno was concerned, if this man, quick witted and smart as he normally was, couldn’t pick up on the strong sarcasm that he put under the notes of that sentence, then he didn’t even want to know how bad he was actually doing.

“Ah, that explains it. You strike me as a very smart lady Juno, so I was surprised at you not knowing.” Juno could feel his cheeks reddening, but he didn’t mention it. “Anyway- Ruby 7 used to be Jet’s horse. And then-” his voice broke off in a hiss of pain. “Once, as he was robbing a bank, I was walking by and I just saw her there. And she looked at me and I looked back at her.”

Juno picked up the needle and thread and, without a warning, he started to sew the cut on Peter’s stomach. There didn’t seem to be many cuts that he would have to sew. Most of them were either thin and small enough to not need stitches, and for a second he was glad that most of them seemed to be burn injuries.

“You looked at her and what then?” Juno asked, noticing how the

man had gotten quiet under his administrations.

“Right,” he let out a pained breath and shut his eyes tightly, before continuing. “I just whistled. I just wanted to see what would happen. I whistled at her and she walked over. First I was content with giving her a few pats and then moving on but-” a hiss, “But she followed me. And when I saw Jet Siquiliak walk out of the bank, his gun in his hand and pointed towards me, I got scared. But the most amazing part was that she didn’t run. Ruby didn’t go back to him. She followed me and as I saw the rage in his face at that, I jumped onto her and booked it.”

If Peter hadn’t been speaking with a voice that promised utmost honesty, he wouldn’t have believed him. To steal the horse of the most dangerous man alive? That was quite a feat.

“She has been with me ever since. And I wouldn’t want to miss her, she’s a good horse,” the thief mumbled as Juno tied off the piece of thread that held the last wound that he deemed big enough to warrant stitching.

As he finished up by cleaning the blood off the sides of the stitches, he soaked the bandage from earlier in alcohol again and moved upwards. There weren’t many wounds on the man’s face, but he decided that if he was already cleaning the wounds on the man's stomach and chest, then he might as well clean them all.

So, as he was carefully using the corner of the bandage to wipe away the blood from Peter’s cheek, the other man smiled, his face right under Juno’s.

“What are you smiling about, Nureyev?” he asked, not actually wanting to know, but just trying to distract the thief once more.

“Well Juno, you’re beautiful,” that made Juno stop in his tracks for a few seconds until he huffed out a laugh.

“Yeah, right,” he mumbled out in disbelief and just continued his work.

It was quiet between them for a few seconds, Juno so focused on cleaning and getting every single bit of blood, before he picked up the burn cream that was in the first aid kit. He applied the cream in thin sheets, not knowing how often he would have to do it, how long this thin tube of pain relieving salve would last them in a place like this.

The silence was comfortable, as Juno’s hands caressed the warm skin of Peter’s chest. It was a professional silence, a silence that was so necessary that he had the feeling that he couldn’t feel awkward, even if he tried.

That was, at least, until Peter broke it.

“Juno?” his voice came out in a thin whisper and the deputy was struck with a strong fear that these might be the last words of the thief.

“Mhm?” he answered, not able to form complete words in his mindset.

“Thank you, you didn’t need to do this.”

Had Nureyev not gone through unimaginable pains today, Juno had the feeling he would have hit him. “No need to thank me, you would have done the same for me.”

A shaky hand reached over to place itself over his own and Juno looked up into the thief's eyes for the first time since he had stumbled back into the room.

"I'm really glad you're here," was the last thing that Juno Steel heard, as he watched those brown eyes close.

As he watched the breathing of the man even out and slow down as he fell asleep. His first thought was to wake him, to get him to stay awake, but he couldn't bring himself to do so. So he just got up, washed his hands in the little bathroom that they had, before returning to see the thief who had saved his life, laying on the ground. His upper body littered in injuries.

"At least the blood is gone now," Juno whispered to himself before he walked over to the small pallets that passed as beds and took the blanket.

It wasn't as soft as the one that Peter had given him in that cave only a few days ago. It felt like it had been months, but he knew better.

He walked over and laid it onto the man's resting form, making sure that it covered his shoulders.

"If you dare to die in your sleep, I'll kill you," he warned the man before he sat down on his own pallet, pondering what had happened while trying to keep the memory of the man's screams out of his mind.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter on the 25th of May!

Summary of the chapter for those who skipped it:

Peter got taken by Miasma, and was tortured in a different room. Juno tried his best to distract himself to not hear it. When Peter came back, Juno started to take care of him, sewing his wounds close and disinfecting them.
Peter tells Juno that he stole Ruby from Jet, and Peter also says this:

“What are you smiling about, Nureyev?” he asked, not actually wanting to know, but just trying to distract the thief once more.

“Well Juno, you’re beautiful,” that made Juno stop in his tracks for a few seconds until he huffed out a laugh.

“Yeah, right,” he mumbled out in disbelief and just continued his work.

Also!!!!! Do not come for me with medical facts, I have no idea about medicine and I'm just making shit up so it's cute. So Please, be kind :D

The Beast In the Dark

Chapter Notes

> Hello again! It's me
>
> Uhm, I hope you enjoy this chapter!
>
> A big shoutout once again to the lovely Fafsernir for betaing, she's the best!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Peter had woken up a few hours later, exhausted and sluggish, but he was awake. He was alive and that was all that mattered to Juno at that moment.

They had gotten food around midday, a sad-looking soup with a piece of bread that was almost hard enough to kill someone with, but through soaking their entire pieces with the soup, they managed to eat it.

Both of them hadn't realised how hungry they had been, but even with being so hungry, Juno still offered Nureyev his bread and the thief took it with a smile that seemed to be sharing a secret. In some way, they were sharing their memories of the cave, of Nureyev passing Juno his food, knowing that the other would need it.

It had only been around half a day, but Juno had the feeling that at that moment, they understood each other without words.

It would be the first one of those moments of hundreds to come.

It was the next day when Juno got back from that room for the first time, bloodied and beaten, and he mostly had questions. The woman who had captured them here was called Miasma. It was a name that rung a bell deep in Juno's subconscious, but he couldn't remember why.

And after his encounter with her, that lasted around thirty minutes and had created more wounds on his body than twenty years of working in law enforcement, the only thing he really knew about her was that she wasn't keen on telling him why he was here, but preferred to just hear him scream than actually getting any answers from him.

As he was slowly dragged to their shared prison, he tried to imagine what his normal routine would have looked like today. How he would have walked into the sheriff station, not appreciating it for a second. Hearing Rita's rambling and not listening to it, just answering in a way that she would leave him alone.

He had never realised how lucky he was to have that. How lucky he had been to wake up in his little house that had always been too lonely for his liking. How lucky he had been to have the possibility to visit Mick in the bar in the evening. How lucky he had been to be able to visit Ben's grave, to be able to talk to him, to be able to see how the wind moved the sand on the gravestone. To pretend that those winds might be his brother, trying to communicate beyond the grave, even though he knew that wasn't possible.

Juno Steel noticed that he had never shown real appreciation for those around him and he wanted to shoot himself in the foot for it.

The door to their cell was opened and he was shoved inside, but before he could hit the floor, two warm and strong arms caught him. They guided him to one of the pallets, where they carefully sat him down before he could feel a wet piece of cloth stinging at his wounds.

As he opened his eyes and let them focus, they focused on a head of dirty black hair, dishevelled and messy from sleeping and, as he noticed only a few seconds later when Nureyev pushed his hand through his hair, also dishevelled from anxiety.

He took his time, looking at the man in front of him, to see his cheekbones, the little dimple that appeared between his eyebrows when he frowned. He took a while to just take Peter Nureyev in.

Eyes scanning over features until he saw Nureyev pick up the needle. And his mind wanted to be somewhere else. He didn't want to think about what was about to happen, he couldn’t.

Thankfully, he didn’t have to.

“How did you get your horse, Juno?” the man in front of him asked, his eyes focused on Juno’s for only a few seconds before he gave him a sad smile and started looking down at the three wounds that would have to be stitched.

Juno knew what the thief was trying to do and he was grateful for it, taking the opportunity to think about happy things instead of his wounds.

“Small Fry used to be a bitch,” he started as Peter started and it startled a soft laugh out of the thief. “No, I mean it. She would throw everyone off when they brought her to the station.” A hiss of pain interrupted him and he took a deep breath before he continued. “So, knowing that she threw everyone off and didn’t let herself be saddled, brushed or anything, Khan, my boss, gave her to me.”

“Why did he give her to you? Are you some sort of horse whisperer?” Peter asked, his voice distracted, but attentive, and Juno didn’t mind continuing his story.

“Far from it, but Khan... Well, he just hated me. You see, he said that a horse should be like its rider and if she was a nuisance that didn’t listen to anyone’s orders, then we would fit together nicely.”

A snort escaped Peter at that and Juno wanted him to repeat that noise. He wanted to hear it again, so badly that he wanted to tell him all his most embarrassing stories, just to get him to laugh.

“Did you? Fit together that is,” Peter asked, his eyes still focused on the cut on Juno’s arm, but for some reason that made it all simpler, It made it easier to speak, knowing that those sharp eyes weren’t searching his face.

“Oh, we fit together like two missing pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It took me a long time to gain her trust. I used to sit on the meadow with her for hours, just hoping that she would calm down enough for me to touch her and, well, it turns out that when you sit with a horse in one space without really paying attention, that horse might start to eat your hat.”

Juno shut himself up quickly, he didn’t want to soil the melody that was the thief's laugh with his own voice. He didn’t want to file that memory away and having to hear himself on it, so he basked in it, for a single moment, until the thief pulled the thread and Juno grunted in pain.

“Sorry Juno, I didn’t mean to.”

“Don’t worry, it just spooked me, is all,” Juno tried to smile as he felt

Nureyev push a bandage over the wound that he had just stitched up, to make sure that all the blood was gone.

When the man pulled the bandage off, Juno let out a small breath. He rolled his shoulders and cracked his neck for good measure, before looking at the thief and trying to smile, which didn't come as hard as he expected. "Thanks, Nureyev, I appreciate it."

The man just smiled back, his sharp canines on display and Juno felt his stomach flip. "Don't mention it."

So he didn't.

They fell into this horrible routine, one of them coming from that horrible room, from that horrible woman and the other taking care of them.

There was an insane feeling of normalcy in it, something that really should not be a feeling that they should be experiencing, not with what they were going through.

But at least they weren't alone. Juno still didn't know why Nureyev was here, hell he didn't even know why he himself was here. Miasma had a wonderful nack for just rambling about someone and hurting him for it.

And Nureyev, well, he kept quiet about it. It wasn't that he didn't talk or tell Juno things, but every time that Juno asked him about why he was here specifically, he just looked so broken that Juno didn't want to bring it up again.

So Juno didn't ask, he was going to give the thief as much time as he needed to tell him.

He was happy to just listen to everything else that the thief told him. He didn't mind his voice, he quite liked it actually and if he was hanging to the man's lips with every word that he spoke, then that was something that he would keep to himself.

In the end, Peter seemed to do the same thing, and if that made Juno share his life more willingly, he wasn't going to say.

It was on their second day, the day that Juno told Peter about Small Fry, that the dread set in for the first time.

It was when they were eating the same sad soup as the previous day that Juno sighed.

The thief met his eyes over the lamp between them. "What's wrong, Juno?"

Juno snorted, and pointed at everything around them, pulling up one of his eyebrows. "Take a guess."

"Mh, I'd say everything is," a playful smirk appeared on his face and it shouldn't be as attractive as it was, considering the bruises on his face.

"Yeah," Juno mumbled before he sighed again. "I just thought about it

and... It's not like people would miss me if I died here. Rita maybe, but the others? I doubt it," Juno spoke carefully.

"Rita? You've never mentioned her before," Peter inquired, putting the empty bowl to his side.

"Oh, I thought I did. She's my secretary, and well, she's a friend."

"What's - oh no, nevermind," Peter started and Juno stared at him. What did he want to say, what did he want to ask?

"No, what did you want to say?"

"It's really not important," Peter said and gave Juno a tense smile.

"Alright, that's fine, if you don't want to talk about it." Juno went back to eating, soaking the bread in the soup and for a minute he asked himself if they bought hard bread for them, or if it really was just that old.

He was so lost in his thoughts that he almost didn't hear it when Peter spoke up again.

"I just wanted to ask, and this is rather stupid Juno, but I wanted to ask what that's like. To have friends, that is," the thief spoke with such a levelled voice, such a factful tone that Juno's heart ached. He didn't have many friends, but at least he had some.

"It's nice," he said slowly, "You really don't have any friends?"

“I do not need them,” the thief spoke quickly and Juno felt like that was a lie. “You don’t become a saddle tramp when you have people keeping you in one space Juno. So, no, I do not have friends, but it’s fine. I manage very well on my own.”

Juno didn’t say anything for a while, just watched the man eat, watched the slowly bruising cheekbones, he watched the eyes that didn’t meet his own and, at that moment, Juno made a decision.

“Nureyev,-” the man’s eyes met his again, a trained mask of indifference on it. “You’re not alone here. We’re both in this fucked up situation, so I personally would call you a friend and I would allow you to do the same.”

Juno had been watching the man closely and he saw the man break, just for the sliver of a second, before the mask was replaced again.

“Thank you, Juno. I appreciate it.”

“Don’t mention it.”

And so, they didn’t, but Juno could tell that Nureyev became more open, more trusting after it. It was a slow process, but it was there.

“So, Rita and I have been working together for a long time, but gods, that woman,” Juno chuckled.

“This was your secretary right?” Peter asked, as he was tending to his own wounds while Juno was lying on his back on his pallet.

“Yeah, she is. She always gives Small Fry so many sugar cubes, I’m gonna come back to a fat horse that only listens to Rita, I can already tell. If I get to go back,” his voice got lower and progressively quieter towards the end and Juno knew that Nureyev understood. There was no promise that they would get out of here.

“Juno, tell me about your home,” Nureyev said and Juno looked at him with eyes that he knew looked too hopeful, too happy. “I’ve only ever passed Hyperion City by, I’d love to hear about it.”

“If you’re sure.”

“I am, would you tell me?” the slight smirk on his lips and his eyes, those deep brown eyes that bore themselves into Juno convinced the deputy to do so.

“Sure. Hyperion City is a shithole if you’ve ever seen one. The rich get richer and the poor stay poor. It’s so obvious that Hyperion is separated into districts and, well, if you come from one, it’s basically impossible to leave that one. We were born in Halcyon Park, but Ben and I grew up in Old Town.-”

“I’m sorry to interrupt, but you’ve never mentioned Ben before,” Nureyev’s smile was cautious, his voice quiet, like a man talking to a skittish cat.

Juno took a deep breath and let his face move upwards, his eyes focused on the ceiling. “Benzaiten Steel, he was my brother.”

For a short second, Nureyev said nothing until Juno suddenly heard a small. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, it’s been a while.”

Then with every ounce of courage that Peter Nureyev had, he asked a question. “Would you tell me about him?”

Silence ruled the basement for a while. Until a shuddered breath from Juno’s pallet broke it. “We were twins, and we got along great. You know. I was always the one planning the trouble but Benten, he always managed to find himself in it. He had this, moral code, everything had to be fair.”

Peter didn’t interrupt Juno as he spoke, he only watched as the deputy put up his hand, as if he was trying to reach the ceiling. But he was lying on the floor, so the ceiling was out of reach. It would always be out of reach.

“Life wasn’t fair to him. He became a dance instructor and if that doesn’t tell you how different we are, then I don’t know what to say.”

Juno got quiet after that and Peter didn’t force him to speak, he understood that this must be hard for Juno, so he let him sit and gather his thoughts before he spoke again.

“He died when we were 19 and-,” he quickly swallowed down the tears that threatened to well up in his eyes. “-I miss him, I even miss being forced to go to his shows and him forcing me to dance so that he could practice. Fuck, it’s been twenty years and I have not once-” he stopped himself.

Juno took a deep breath, and before he could start speaking, he heard Peter speak up. “Would you like to? Dance, that is?”

Juno thought about it for a second. He let his head fall to the side so that he could see Nureyev, sitting there, the light of the lamp flooding him in the softest light and, for some reason, Juno didn’t want to say no, he wanted to hold those hands in his and glide over the floor of their cell as if they were in a glorious ballroom.

So, he took pity on the thief and stood up, walked over and held out his hand. “Just so you know, I will not go easy on you,” he smiled out as the thief took his hand in his.

“Do your worst, Deputy,” Nureyev grinned as he let himself be helped up from his pallet.

“Thief,” Juno smiled, as he placed his hand on Nureyev’s waist while taking the other into his own hand.

He lead them into a slow waltz, noticing how his entire body felt sore and worn out, but it felt good to move in the practised steps.

And, for the first time since they had thrown him into this room, he felt calm, for just a minute, as they moved around together, spinning and twirling until Peter stopped them when his injury on his thigh started hurting.

Juno led him back to his pallet and helped him sit down.

“I hope it doesn’t hurt too much.”

“It’s fine. Really, I just didn’t expect it.”

They fell into a comfortable silence, a silence that filled most of their time in the basement.

“Thank you,” Juno smiled at the other man, and as he smiled back, Juno could feel his ears turning red.

“You’re rather good, it must be wonderful to see you dance in a ballroom,” Peter joked.

“Stick around and find out, I suppose,” Juno answered before he could stop himself.

“Sounds like a promise,”

“Maybe it is,”

“Well, then I can’t wait to see if it is.”

Juno woke up to a short scream of “No!” coming from beside him. It didn’t take long for his brain to wake up, and to understand what the rattling breaths next to him meant. He didn’t think he would ever see

it, and he secretly wished that he would have never had to see it, but the universe didn't follow his wishes.

"Nureyev," he whispered, grabbing the lamp from beside him and turning it on.

The thing about the dark is that while it hides the monsters and gives them the possibility for them to come closer to you, grab you and pull you into their grasp, the dark also protects us. It hides the ugly things, the things we do not want to see. It hides the things that break our hearts. It hides the thieves, as they cry into their hands while hyperventilating. It hid the part that Peter Nureyev wanted to hide and Juno finally understood why his outfit had always been completely black. No one looks at you if you blend in, and if no one looks at you, no one can see your baggage.

He moved closer to the shaking form of the thief. It was their twenty-third day in this basement and Juno noticed at that moment that he had never given the other man a hug. He wasn't a touchy person, the only person that he had hugged in the last years had been Rita and that was also only when she forced it.

But as he was sitting in front of this man, the thief that he had started to care more and more about and seeing how he was shaking, seeing how his tears fell freely, he wanted to pull him into a hug, but he wasn't sure if he could.

"Nureyev? Can I hug you?" he asked, keeping his voice light and careful, trying not to scare the other man and failing as he flinched backwards rapidly, almost falling onto the ground.

"Okay," Juno mumbled, that was not a good sign. "Can I touch your hand?"

He saw a small nod at that, so he reached out, grimacing when he saw that the thief leaned away from him. “It’s okay, it’s me, it’s Juno,” he tried to reassure as he pulled the hand to his chest, splaying it on the middle of his chest.

“Can you feel me breathe?” he whispered, before inhaling dramatically.

He saw another small nod, and he responded with his own. “Breathe with me, okay? Just breathe with me.”

They spend the next few minutes like that. Juno breathing in, long and slow, and Peter trying to match it with his own rattling breath. Juno whispered helpful nothings, as he tried to focus on the other man’s breathing.

Juno didn’t know how long they stayed like that, it could have been minutes or hours, but both were fine with it. All he wanted was for Peter to be okay.

And when the thief’s breathing slowed and calmed enough for him to whisper out a quiet: “Thank you,” Juno noticed that he was still holding the other man’s hand.

“It’s okay, but are you?” came out of Juno’s mouth before he could stop himself.

The thief let out a small laugh. “I’m better, thanks to you.”

The silence that they fell into wasn’t as comfortable as their normal silence was, there was no real comfort in it. Only questions without

answers and answers waiting for the right questions.

“I suppose if we’re stuck here and are going to die here, I might as well tell you, Deputy,” his voice was still shaky, his throat sore from crying and his entire body shook with each breath he took. “I will tell you it all now and then you decide whether or not Peter Nureyev’s baggage is worth your time or if you and I part ways, once all of this is done.”

He didn’t want to know, not really. He didn’t care who Peter Nureyev used to be, he didn’t care what baggage he brought. Peter Nureyev made him… Feel things. Things that Juno couldn’t explain. Not yet. So he didn’t care, but he knew that Peter did, and if Peter was willing to tell him, if this situation was the one where he had to make the choice whether he wanted Peter Nureyev in his life, then he was willing to make it.

“It’s okay. Let’s do this,” he whispered, loud enough for the thief to hear, as he raised his head and those dark eyes caught his once more.

He felt how Nureyev’s hand moved to his chest again and heard how the man matched his breathing.

“You’ve asked me, multiple times now, why I am here. I have always either avoided the question, told you to lay off, or simply didn’t respond. Well, Juno Steel, I think it is time I tell you the truth about Peter Nureyev and Miasma’s issues with him,” He took a deep breath, looking away from Juno in a way that Juno just wanted to beg him to look at him again, to see him again, to let himself be seen.

“I killed the only person that Miasma ever cared about.”

Juno took it in, those words, the slight tremor in the thief’s voice. The

fact that he still didn't look at him. All he did was press Nureyev's hand tighter to his chest, making the man look up.

Juno didn't do anything but squeeze the man's hand again, in a way that said: *"Keep going, I'm here if you need me."*

"I was born in a city named Brahma. It's similar in size to Hyperion City and I do not remember much from my childhood. You see, most of my childhood and adolescence wasn't spent in Brahma. I tended to be on the run, from the law and, well, after a while, from anyone that I took something from that they wanted to keep.

"My only consolation at that time was that I wasn't alone. A man had found me, when I was still young, around the age of seven or six. I had been stealing from people's pockets as they passed me by and I made the mistake of trying to steal from his pockets. He was a broad man and his yellow owl-like eyes caught me immediately, but he wasn't mad. He told me that with a little help, I could be a great thief. So I followed him, I let him mentor me and I followed his rules and his plan.

"You see, this man was called Mag and we were a good team. A great one, even. His plan was to take out the Guardian System of New Kinshasa. I had heard of the place before and of the system, but I didn't remember from where. So I just followed his lead. I became better and better, every day. I managed to pull disappearing acts so good that not even Mag could find me.

"But even as I was getting better, Mag ruled over me with an iron fist. He told me what to do, he told me the next plan and I followed. Sometimes though, he pretended to be my father. For heists mostly. I remembered my real father, he had been a kind man, a man who was so different from Mag that it felt disgusting to me to even pretend, but I did it. I had to.

"It wasn't until we went to New Kinshasa that I found out the plan. It was while we were talking to one of the people working on the angel system that I found out. We were going to work with Miasma, and the

plan was to not just disentangle the guardian angel system but to destroy both Brahma and New Kinshasa. I remember fighting with him, screaming at him, but he didn't listen.

"While we yelled at each other, the man,-" he let out a breath. "The man ran towards Miasma, and Mag turned around, he turned his back on me and he spoke to the man. I do not remember his name, but I remember every word my former mentor said to the shaking form of a man. *Let's find out if you see some of those angels that you always talk about.* Those were his words and it didn't take a second until I was back, back in Brahma, back in the little cupboard in the kitchen of the small house that I grew up in. It took a second to remember where I had heard those words before. It was only moments before I had run out, to hold my father while he was bleeding out, telling me to run. To take all the money we had and to run away. And so I did. I did everything that my father asked of me and it only got me closer to the man that killed him.

"I confronted him about it, asked him why he never told me. Why he decided to keep it from me, and do you know what he answered?"

Juno shook his head, not trusting his own mouth to form words.

"He said that he had forgotten, that he didn't remember killing my father. I didn't know what to do, the rage was boiling inside of me and as he turned around again, facing his back towards me and started talking to the man, about the explosives and where their location would be, I made a choice. I couldn't let so many innocent people die. I couldn't stand by as two major cities were destroyed. So, I didn't. I ran up to him and stabbed him in the back, before pulling out my knife and stabbing again and again." Peter closed his eyes, his hand still firmly on Juno's chest. "I stabbed him right in front of her eyes and before she could get to me, I was gone. I used the methods he had taught me to perfect, used all the means at my disposal to hide, and I managed it."

He got quiet for a while, before Juno spoke up to ask a question. "Brahma and Kinshasa, they're still there right? Why did she give up

on their plan?"

Peter laughed at that. It was a small laugh, careful, calculated. "It's very hard to blow up two cities when the kid that killed your partner stole the map."

The smile faded from the thief's face as he looked at his lap. Juno felt the pull of the thief's hand against his and he let him take it back.

And for the first time since they had been captured together, since they had sat in this basement, wasting away in their blood and injuries. For the first time, the silence felt oppressing. It was deafening to Juno's ears, pressing further and further into his chest, until it settled there like an anxious beast waiting to be broken, to be destroyed.

But Juno didn't want to kill the silence, he only wanted to tame it, to make it theirs again. So he took his hand and slowly placed it onto the thief's in front of him. Giving it a gentle squeeze, he found his voice again.

"You saved countless lives, Nureyev. You did the right thing," he breathed out, not wanting to disturb the beast more than he had to.

There was a moment of silence between them, of gentle consideration, as Peter Nureyev looked into Juno's eyes. Juno could feel that he was searching for something in them, but he couldn't tell if it was there.

And when Peter let go of his hand, he worried that everything he had said had been the wrong thing, that he had misunderstood. That he had been wrong. But then, gentle arms laid themselves around him and Nureyev pulled him into a hug that Juno gladly gave back.

It didn’t matter how long they sat there, just holding each other, because as Juno pulled away in the end, he could feel it. The beast walking past him, carefully caressing his shoulders with its presence.

Whatever the beast was, he knew that it was tamed.

Chapter End Notes

The next two chapters are coming out tomorrow!

I hope you enjoyed it! If you did, let me know!!

I hope you have a lovely night!

A Few Tears Left To Cry

Chapter Notes

> The next few chapters are going to come very quickly, I just had to edit the last one for a long time, because it was so long and I just didn't manage to be happy with it

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Juno didn’t know how many days had passed when he woke up to the rattling of keys at their door. His eyes slowly adjusted to the dim light, and he saw Nureyev, his back straight against the wall. The glasses smudged, his face stained with old blood and dirt from the floor and the walls. Somehow he still looked peaceful, as if all of this wasn’t bothering him, as if his mind couldn’t be shaken.

Juno knew that he himself didn’t look like that, and he knew that he probably never would, but that was why he admired Nureyev. It seemed like nothing could surprise him. Even now, slowly waking from his slumber and focusing his eyes on the sound from the door, he didn’t look phased. Maybe a little confused but not surprised.

The Deputy tore his eyes away from the other man when the door creaked open and Miasma walked inside. She was flanked by two men, one of whom licked his lips and that was when Juno knew that these weren’t her normal workers, these weren’t the poor men and women that she muted, just because she didn’t want to be distracted from her work. These were outsiders.

“Thief. Get up,” she commanded and to Juno’s surprise the other man stood up calmly and swiftly, not even budging for a second. It only took him three long strides to stand next to Miasma and have his shackles grabbed by the man on her right.

He didn’t utter a single word, he just stood there. When he looked over and his eyes met Juno’s, the faintest hint of a smile appeared on

his face, and it stayed while Miasma started speaking.

“Say Goodbye to your friend here, Deputy,” her voice was as calm as it had always been. Her cold gaze settling on Juno just as Peter’s warm one left him to look at Miasma.

“Ah, The noose then, huh?” he spoke with his usual nonchalant attitude. Something that Juno really couldn’t understand. Hell, this woman was going to bring him to the gallow, he was going to get his neck snapped by a rope thicker than a child's arm, and here he was, fine with it.

“I would expect as much.” The way she said it, no care or mind in her voice at all. No compassion for the living or dead.

Juno jumped up. Almost too fast, as he felt his feet tumble forward but he just kept the momentum to get further to the man. He wanted to run forward, wanted to stop Miasma from putting her filthy hands on Peter, but the thief just shook his head.

“Don’t waste your strength, Juno, dear. One of us should get out of this alive, don’t you think? And I don’t mind if the universe chooses you to be that someone,” his voice was casual and controlled, but the smile he gave Juno was sad, tired. As if he had expected this outcome and had come to terms with it already. As if he didn’t care for his own life, but only for Juno’s.

Which was, frankly, something that Juno just couldn’t accept, so he ran forward, trying to get his hands on the guard to Peter’s left, but before he could even get there, a strong kick to his chest threw him back onto the ground.

Heaving from the kick, Juno looked up into the thief's face. A face that was so sad, so empty, so tired. And that was when Juno understood, he truly did. So he sat back down, and gave Peter a long look before

the man was taken away.

Once Peter was gone, Juno allowed himself the sob that was clawing at his throat, he didn't need to make the man worry more before his death. Especially not about some useless Deputy that had probably brought him into this situation in the first place. Juno felt terrible, downright miserable, as he lay down on the small pallet that Miasma was passing off as a bed. He knew that sleep wasn't going to take him soon, but he didn't want to think anymore, he didn't want to imagine what the other must be thinking, must be going through. He didn't want to think about what that beautiful face might look like with the muscles lax and a noose around his head.

So he decided that he wouldn't. That he would sleep and just hope that this was a bad dream, that this was only something that his brain imagined to hurt him.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter will be uploaded this evening!

I hope you enjoyed it! Comments and Kudos are always appreciated

Btw! You can find me on Tumblr and on Twitter under Justthingstbh!
I always tweet out when I post the next chapter and I'm always up for talking about TPP or any podcast!
I hope you have a lovely day and I'll see you tonight!

Matters of the Heart

Chapter Summary

Peter Nureyev is being walked to his death, but he has been in situations like this way too often to not have a plan

Chapter Notes

So, I kinda completely fucked up my time organisation and things have been hard lately, so I will try to actually post like two a day now, to make it for posting time.

I hope you are all doing well

Thanks like always to Fafsernir for betaing

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Peter Nureyev never expected to live a long life. It just wasn't what was normal in his line of work. People got shot while breaking in, got caught, killed each other for profit and well, they got hung. The same fate that he was facing.

He never really expected to be hung, he expected to be shot, a quick projectile burying itself in his body, taking him out of this life as quickly as he came into it. That's what he expected. What he had hoped for. Being hung was always the last on his lists, mostly because you couldn't really do anything about it, you could only stand there, the necklace of death around your throat, lying heavy on your shoulders like the arms of a lover, a lover who would, in the end, destroy you so completely that you probably would never find the pieces.

And then, in a moment, if you're lucky, you're gone. Neck snapped and the air pushed out of your throat.

It wasn't a death that he had expected, it was a death that he wanted to avoid at all cost. And it was going to be the one that took him from

this life anyway.

As he was sitting on Ruby's back, holding onto the saddle with his shackled hands, and the bag over his head, he tried to come up with a plan. He couldn't just leave Juno there, he would die. He couldn't let the only person he cared about die, that was just not something that he could bring himself to do.

So he had to come up with something. First, he needed the bag off, the shackles needed to leave too. How would he do either of those things? He didn't know yet, but he would figure it out. He always did. Until now he had gotten out of every situation he had found himself in, hell, the fact that he was still alive was proof enough.

Still alive.

He had Juno to thank for that. Not really, of course. He could have gotten out of the hold of the Sheriff easily, and he could have probably avoided seeing the Deputy again, but… Juno had made him feel something again. For the first time in a very long time. He wasn't sure what it was, what the clenching in his chest was every time he saw the Deputy fall asleep with new bruises on his face from Miasma. He wasn't sure why he always wanted to throw himself between the Deputy and the woman, why everything was so much harder but so much easier with him around.

Why everything that felt impossible, suddenly felt manageable, as long as they did it together. Peter didn't want to think about it, but it was impossible to think about anything else. His brain was clutching to the one thing that had made him feel alive most in his life and that something, that someone, was slowly rotting away in a basement a few miles from here.

Peter didn't know how long Juno would survive on his own. The Lady

seemed to have a lot of stamina, he had managed to keep himself alive this long, but he didn't want to think about how he must feel now that he was alone. Now that he had no one in his corner.

Now that Peter was gone.

Juno would survive. He needed to believe that. How else could he go on?

Gods, he sounded like a romantic fool. But when you find someone that makes you feel alive, in a moment in your life when all you can think of is death, maybe you should keep them close.

That's at least how Peter saw it, he didn't know if Juno felt the same, he would be surprised if he did. But it didn't matter, even if Juno hated him, the Deputy didn't deserve to die in a shithole like that.

But he wasn't any good for Juno if he was hanging as a warning from a sad tree half an hour out of the city to scare off some lousy bandits. No, he needed to get out of the shackles, he needed to get the bag off his head and, most importantly, he needed to get away from the two guards. All easier said than done, but he had done harder things in his life.

Like lying to himself that he didn't feel anything for the detective, but that was something he wasn't going to think about at the moment.

At the moment, he had to get away from all of this, to save his the Deputy.

He tried to assess the situation as best as he possibly could. From when they brought him here, he knew that Hyperion city must be at least an hour if not a two-hour ride from the safehouse. Hyperion

would be the only place where he could shake the bandits off. Of course, he could try to do it at any point, but his chances of escaping without any sort of cover were low, so he was going to have to wait.

From the way the sun was hitting him in the back, he could tell that they were going west. They had grabbed him out of that stinky basement right after the haphazard breakfast that they had served them. Peter didn't let his brain give into the thought that that might have been their last meal together. He couldn't and wouldn't accept that.

But with the information that they were heading into Hyperion from the east, he knew that they would have to pass the brothel that was on the outskirts of town. Vixen Valley.

If he was lucky, a few prostitutes were out. Maybe they were distracting enough for the bandits that he could pull the bag from his head and rip Ruby's reins from the man in front of him and make an escape.

The only problem with that was that he would still be wearing shackles. Who would be able to take off the shackles quickly and wouldn't immediately rat him out?

He pondered over that for a while. He didn't really know anyone in Hyperion. Juno had told him about his secretary Rita, whom he said was an angel but Nureyev was never allowed to tell her that Juno had said that. She fell out of the race quickly, because the only place that Peter would find her was at the Sheriff's office, a bad place to show up shackled and with a hefty bounty on his head.

Juno had also mentioned a man called Mick Mercury, but Peter had no idea what he looked like, or where to find him, so he was out of the race too.

The only other person that Juno really talked about, who wasn't one of the people that also worked in the Sheriff's office was his brother and Peter didn't even have to consider that option. Unless the dead had learned to rise again and had learned to pick locks, he wouldn't be of any use.

A thought crept into his mind at the memory of how Juno had talked about his brother. The sadness in his voice, the pain.
And for a second, a terrifying second, his mind supplied the image of another gravestone next to the one that Juno had described that one time. But this one held the name 'Juno Steel, Deputy and friend'. The thought stung and Peter took a deep breath to force the image out of his mind.

He wouldn't let that happen, couldn't let it happen. Hell, the first time he had met Juno Steel he had saved his life. He wouldn't let that go to waste. Juno had mentioned that he had gone to a Doctor afterwards who had complimented Peter's haphazard way of stitching a wound and that was when Peter sat up straighter on Ruby as an idea pierced his head.

The Doctor.

A person with tools strong enough to break bones easily should be able to snap some weak shackles. Juno had also mentioned that the Doctor had wanted a word with Peter. The Deputy hadn't really explained why, but from how Juno had spoken of the man, Peter had the feeling he could trust him. And if not, the Deputy had also mentioned that the man was quite old. He would be fine.

He closed his eyes as his lips curled up in a smile under the burlap of the sack that was over his head and he relaxed into the way too familiar movements of Ruby. He had a plan. Of course, it wasn't a plan without any issues. If he had to be honest with himself, he didn't

enjoy many variables that could go wrong with his plan but he tried to not think about it. If something was to go wrong, he would be able to come up with something on the spot. He had always been good with that.

But now, he just had to wait. There was nothing he could do now, so he just hummed a tune and waited for the all too familiar sounds of the city to hit his ears.

The sun was burning up his back when Peter's ears finally caught the sound of an unfamiliar voice that wasn't the two guards. The voice was still far away, but it was growing louder by the minute and Peter couldn't wipe the smile off his face. He could do this, he knew that he could. Now, he just had to prove his skill to himself and everyone around him.

Vixen Valley was close, he could tell. The shrilling voices of working women and men, every moan faker than the one before, the deep voice of their singer who had been singing in the brothel for as long as Peter could remember and, of course, the ones who were essential to his plan. The advertising workers outside.

He bent his head down the second that he heard feet hit the road. Someone was walking towards them. From the sound of the footsteps, he guessed a shorter person and someone taller, taking long strides through the heavy sand.

"Well, hello there," he heard a female voices say, a little rough around the edges from years of obvious smoking, but a beautiful voice nonetheless. "Don't you two look like you need to have a good time."

Now, the two guards just had to bite and Peter's plan would work.

Just as he started to doubt his two guards' interest in the woman, one of them spoke up. "Only problem with your good time is the price, sugar."

Peter could feel someone looking at him, it was the burning kind of look that sizzled your insides more than you wanted it to, more than you felt comfortable with. But he knew that this was his only chance, so while the man spoke to the woman, he bent forward, grabbed the top of the burlap sack and moved upwards again, freeing his head and face from its confinement and he took the first breath of fresh air that he had taken in weeks.

As he breathed out though, he saw who was staring at him. It was the taller woman who had walked up with the other. Her dark hair was reflecting the sun in the midday light and he had to squint when looking at her.

She was beautiful, he wasn't going to deny that and if he was lucky, she would be exactly the person he had hoped for. The distraction that he needed to get Ruby's bridle off her face and turn to run.

He noticed that her gaze on him didn't falter and he gave her a sad smile, lifting his shackled hands into the air before dropping them and shrugging. He knew that he was trying his best to evoke her sympathy and when she smiled back, he felt a weight fall from his shoulders. Maybe this plan would work, maybe he would get to be freed of these shackles. Maybe he would get to see Juno again. And maybe, just maybe, he might tell the Deputy how he felt.

Maybe.

But that was all wishful thinking, thinking that was reserved for when he wasn't shackled and on a horse that was still tied to another man's saddle, but he wasn't willing to give up hope. Not yet.

Not when that woman's gaze moved from him to his captors and she walked straight towards the one who was holding Ruby.

"Aren't you a sight for sore eyes? It has been a while since someone as handsome as you came into town. It would be a damn shame if you left before I could get my hands on you," she spoke, a voice sultrier than silk, warmer than the sun on his back and richer than all the people in Hyperion City combined.

If his heart wasn't already somewhere else, he might have fallen for her, given it to her freely and openly, for her to do as she wished with it, but his heart was safely guarded by a deputy who didn't even know that he was carrying it.

She beckoned the other girls who were waiting on the porch towards them with a small hand gesture and in a few seconds, the two men were surrounded by six beautiful women, who were touching them, letting their hands glide up and down the men's thighs. Peter could tell that they had basically forgotten about why they were here, or at least he wasn't their main focus anymore. He quickly closed his eyes in a prayer of thanks to every prostitute who ever lived.

As he had his eyes closed though, he heard the voice of the woman again. Soultry, beautiful and speaking with obvious intent.

He opened his eyes the second she started talking and as she was doing so, he saw one of the women position herself at the back of the saddle of the man who was tied to him. He watched as she worked on Ruby's reigns, hiding them away from the man's sight and untying them slowly and carefully, just as the black-haired woman was

speaking.

“Just say the word and we can go and I can show you how a real woman rides. If you catch my drift.”

He didn’t know what was happening, he had simply wanted a distraction, but the women had obviously decided that today was his lucky day. Everything was happening quickly and he didn’t have time to thank them though. The black-haired woman’s words were echoing the women’s actions and, as soon as she said “catch”, the reigns flew over Ruby’s head and Peter raised his shackled hands at the last second to catch them.

He heard the men shout loudly as he tugged them to the side and Ruby took off with a running start. He urged her forward, something he would normally never do, but he had to. He had to survive, he had to save Juno.

As he rode through the shrinking streets of Hyperion City that brought him to Old Town, he knew that the woman would find a hefty sum of money the next time that he had some to spare.

The second he passed the city border into Old Town he felt safer, even if he could still hear the two men looking for him. Angry shouting passing through the spaces in the houses, but slowly the wind started to drown them out and Peter let himself breathe. A soft pull on the reigns and Ruby started to slow down. If he had been a lesser man, he probably would have celebrated, but he knew that he was in no way safe yet. He needed to find the Doc, he needed to save Juno.

Juno’s life was still on the line and Peter was not going to stop until he knew the Deputy was safe.

But first, he needed to find the Doc. That was priority number one.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will be up on the **27th of May**

Thank you to all the people that have been commenting, you're a light in my life and I appreciate you greatly.

The Scalpel's Edge

Chapter Summary

A revelation, a confession and a plan.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Old Town's roads were almost hauntingly empty. Once or twice Peter saw a few mice make their way over the road, but that was the extend of life that he saw, until he turned left and found an old woman sitting in the shade. She was cleaning a gun, slowly, methodically, as if she had done so hundreds, no, thousands of times.

Before Peter could speak up to get the woman's attention, she was already looking at him. Her old eyes were attentive and still clear. It felt like being watched by a hawk. If the hawk could kill him in a single blow.

When she didn't speak and just stared, he decided to speak up first. "The Doctor, where can I find him?"

An unsettling feeling ran along his spine as the woman looked him up and down, before staring into his face and nodding her head to the left, indicating that he needed to keep going straight.

"He's got a sign out front. Impossible to miss," she said and her voice sounded like sandpaper.

He just nodded at her. "Thank you, ma'am. Have a wonderful day."

And with that, he kept on going.

With the instructions the old woman had given him, it didn’t take him long to find the small wooden house, the only indication that it wasn’t a normal house was a sign hanging over the door.

Hospital and Apothecary

He nodded quickly, to himself more than to anyone in particular. If this plan wasn't going to work, he had to find a different way, he had to find some kind of possibility to get these chains off, to return, to get Juno out of there. He didn’t have much hope if he was completely honest with himself, but he needed to believe that the Doctor would help him. But in case he didn't, he would find a way. He had to.

So he jumped as gracefully off of Ruby as he could with shackled hands, which was still surprisingly graceful, and made his way over to the door. He left Ruby untied, she wouldn’t leave him, she never had and he preferred giving her the possibility to run than to be a sitting duck.

The door felt like it was ages away, his movements slow, careful and almost scared. Every step felt like a mountain, the uncertainty of the probability of his plan lying in his stomach like a bag of stones.

And then he was at the door and as he knocked, everything seemed to suddenly move in real-time again. The wind was still singing through the cracks of the houses, the sun was shining down on him, warming him to his bones without warming him in the way that Juno had managed to in that damp basement.

With a quick pull, the door opened inwards and Peter had the feeling he was going to fall forward, so lost in his own thoughts that he wasn’t sure if the man had needed a second to open the door or an hour.

Before Peter could speak, the man looked him up and down and as he saw his shackled hands, he took the chain that connected the hands into his grip and quickly pulled Peter inside, looking left and right as he put his other hand on Peter's back to nudge him further in.

The door was closed quicker than it had been opened and Peter, uncomfortable with having someone behind him that he couldn't see, turned to the man.

He looked like he was in his early sixties, his dark hair mixed with white in places, the lines in his face deep and obvious. The lines that were the most pronounced were the laugh lines around his mouth and eyes and Peter could tell that even with the worry lines on the man's face, this man had lived a happy life.

"So, who are you and who did you piss off to find yourself shackled in front of my doorstep?" The man spoke and what Peter noticed first was his soothing voice. The man sounded like someone that could soothe a scared horse with a simple word. A man who had spent his entire career dealing with people being terrified, or people worrying.

He didn't know how to answer the man's question though. He was nobody to most people, no one knew his real name except for Juno. And then it struck him.

"I'm the man that sewed up Juno Steel a while back, he told me you wanted to see me." Not technically a lie, Peter told himself. Juno had said that the man had wanted a word with him.

The eyes that were looking at him suddenly widened at the mention of Juno's name. "Have you seen him? Rita keeps coming by and asking if I've seen him. He's been missing and I have to admit that I am quite worried about him."

Peter hadn't expected the man to fall into a hole of worry when he mentioned Juno. And he remembered Juno's words, spoken only days ago in the safety of that dark basement.

"It's not like people would miss me if I died here. Rita maybe, but the others? I doubt it."

Oh, how wrong the lady was. But Peter didn't blame him, asking "Hey would you miss me if I left?" wasn't really a topic you brought up in normal conversation.

"I know where he is, I was held at the same place as him, but they decided to bring me to the gallows." Peter moved closer to the man, only around twenty centimetres separating them. "I need you to get me out of these shackles to get him out of there, I doubt that he is going to survive."

The doctor nodded quickly and turned around, disappearing from the room, only to reappear after a few moments with heavy pliers. They looked like they were normally used for bone and not for the metal that was binding Peter, but they would work.

Peter held his hands out, and as the doctor positioned the pliers over the chain, holding them there, he looked at the thief, his grey eyes searching for something in Peter's.

"I will help you, but I need to ask something. Why are you risking your life by going back into this place to save someone who didn't even know your name the last time I heard him speak of you. Why did you save him all those weeks ago?"

The Doctor held their gaze and Peter stared right back. His lips were pulled into a tight thin line, as he searched for something in his face

and, suddenly, the man's face dropped from confusion into a soft understanding.

"So you understand?" Peter asked as the man snapped the chain.

The doctor just smiled and took Peter's hand into his to drop a lockpick into his hand. "I think anyone who knows what love is would understand, my boy."

Peter swallowed heavily at the man's words as the Doc turned away to putter about the room.

Love.

He didn't know how he felt about labelling the emotion that clawed deep in his stomach in that way. He wouldn't say that the man was particularly wrong, but love called for dependency, for commitment, for the other person to reciprocate.

So love didn't seem right.

Love would never seem right.

He moved the lockpick with practised ease, opening the shackles one at a time, while his brain went and tried to imagine it. What it would be like, to actually settle down with Juno, to wake up every morning, not in a damp basement but in a soft bed, pulling the lady closer and falling back asleep while smelling his hair.

It was an unnecessary fantasy, one that would only bring pain and

disappointment, but it filled him with warmth anyway. With content. So he let his heart indulge those fantasies while his hands worked to open the shackles. It was a practised manoeuvre and he had them open quickly, and the second the shackles dropped with a heavy clunk to the floor, he cut off the fantasy. He didn't have time to indulge in thinking about the happiness that he might be able to find with the Deputy if the Deputy in question could be killed at any moment.

"So, where is Juno?" the Doc asked, when he noticed that Peter's hands were free of offending metal.

"A two-hour ride to the east. In a damp basement that I, too, called my home for the last few weeks." Peter said quickly while rubbing the skin that had been shackled just a minute ago.

The Doc rubbed his hand over his face and sighed. "Not really a position anyone wants to be in."

With a tight smile, Peter answered "Not really."

"So, what's the plan, nameless one?"

Peter had to smile at that. Juno hadn't told the man. Hell, Juno might have told no one. Juno kept his secret safe. Him safe.

Juno had understood.

"Peter Ransom." He quickly introduced himself and the Doc nodded.

"Alan Miller, nice to meet you," Peter responded with a nod, before continuing.

“To get back to the point, the woman’s henchpeople wear bandanas over most of their face. If I can manage to grab one and cover my face. I might be able to infiltrate if we are lucky, and keep my head down low, before taking him and running.”

Dr Miller sat down on an old wooden chair that creaked under his weight, which wasn’t a lot, so Peter had to admit that he worried about the stability of said chair.

“What colour are the bandanas? And how are you going to get one?” He asked, slowly running his hand over his beard. If Peter’s head hadn’t been busy with concern for Juno, he might have noticed how worried the man looked, how his beard stroking was an anxious tick. Because Alan Miller was terrified to his core, just waiting for the confirmation of his worst fear.

“A dark green, with a black, hard to see the pattern on it,” Peter walked forward, closer to the man, a mask of certainty pulled over his face. “And I will kill the two guards if it’s the only way I can get one. I will treasure no human life if they can work for a person like her, Dr Miller.”

The older man sighed and pushed his hands through his hair. “You won’t have to worry about that, my boy. I can get you one.” With his hands on the side of the chair, the older man pushed himself upwards and something had changed in him. Peter noticed that suddenly, for the first time that he had been talking to the man, he looked weak. He looked to be the age that his wrinkles suggested. He looked frail, like a leaf in the wind.

And, as the man secured his grip on the doorway while walking towards the other room, Peter understood. The man knew this woman, Miasma, that had been holding them, he knew, but it didn’t seem like he wanted to know. It seemed like someone had known her.

Someone close to him.

Before Peter could decide whether he would ask, the man was coming back into the room, holding the piece of cloth in his hands like it personally offended him and then he suddenly couldn't hold back.

"Who was it?" He whispered, his voice soft and careful, like a man talking to a spooked horse. Quiet, just making sure to not scare the animal away.

The older man's features fell, and Peter had thought he couldn't look older. He had been wrong.

"It was Juno's mother."

When Peter didn't respond, the man took a deep breath, sat back down on his chair and began to explain.

"I do not know how much Juno has told you, but Sarah Steel used to be a member of Miasma's gang. A quite successful one at that, if the stories that I have heard are correct. The only problem was, she fell in love. I never knew who he was, but I knew that when she came to Hyperion, he was long gone and Sarah, well, she was so pregnant that she looked ready to burst when she rode into town.

"People had told her about me, so when she rode into town, I was her first stop. She begged me to help and I was never a man to deny a person in need, so I took her under my care. Made sure that the twins were born as healthy and happy babies." The man stopped, looked at Peter, then averted his gaze to the floor.

“It didn’t take long. Her mental health started to deteriorate. Paranoia and stress eating away at her brain. She had gotten a normal job as one of the security women in the brothel. Honest pay for honest work, but,” he let out another long sigh. “She started hurting the boys. First it was minor things, a slap here or there. I saw them on the streets sometimes. It was never more than a tiny jab. I never thought it would be something that would leave bruises. I still told her to stop, but she didn’t listen. She never did. I tried to take the boys away from her then, but I had no proof and when I did, they were old enough that I couldn’t do anything.

“The first time that Juno came into the clinic with a split lip and an open gash at his eyebrow I thought he had been in a bar fight. Many young people get into those, I see those kinds of injuries a lot. I made a joke and I thought it didn’t land, because he didn’t say anything about it. I thought he might have lost so badly that he was in a sour mood to the topic, but then I saw his knuckles.”

Alan looked up and stared into Peter’s face, who was still just standing there. Unable to move, unable to breathe, it felt like. Only able to listen.

“Peter, there were no bruises on his hands. He didn’t fight back. At all. So I asked who he had gotten the injuries from, but he didn’t answer. He never answered.” A choke was pulled from his throat. “He never did until the night that he brought Ben into the clinic, his shirt soaked in his brother's blood, who was hanging from his shoulder like a bag. He screamed at me, yelled. Begged me to save him and I tried my best but in the end? I couldn’t save him. It was too late.”

The silence that rang in the room when he stopped speaking was heavier than any weight that Peter could ever imagine, but he didn’t feel like breaking it. It wasn’t his place to ask questions. His place was only to listen, to wait. To understand.

“Six shots. That’s how many times she had pulled the trigger. Six. An entire barrel. Sheriff’s department said that she had gone insane. Started hallucinating, saw green bandanas at every corner. And then,

when Ben was wearing his new shirt for the show in the Inn, he was a singer. It had been a deep green and she, well, her paranoia got the better of her.

“She had always spoken of trying to protect her children, and in the end? She was the one that killed both of them.”

“Both of them?” Peter inquired carefully.

“It took Juno 9 years to smile again. He still rarely does. With Ben, she managed to kill her one child and her other’s happiness.

“The burial was on a warm summer's day. It felt too bright to be a funeral day until you looked at Juno. He was the storm cloud that the sun hid behind to save herself from his wrath. He promised me on that day that he would never let something like this happen again.”

He smoothed the fabric between his fingers and only then was the moment that Peter saw the blood on it.

“She killed herself in her cell a day later. I was asked to fill out the death certificate, so I did. In the end, the Sheriff gave me this,” and with a weak hand, he held up the offending piece of fabric. “They found it on her, tied so tightly around her throat that they were surprised that that didn’t kill her. I wanted to take it to Juno, but Khan told me not to. Juno had not wanted to talk to his mother the entire time she had been in their cell. She was dead to him before her pulse stopped. She was dead to him before Ben’s body was cold. I think she was dead to him the second she ever raised her hand against his brother.

“So, Juno didn’t want it. And for some reason, my brain told me to keep it. I haven’t touched it since I put it into the drawer that it was in. There had never been a reason to do so. Until now.” His eyes found Peter’s and Peter understood. This piece of fabric had been lying like a burden on this man’s shoulders for far too many years to count.

So he walked forward. Carefully taking step after step. And everything felt like time was slowed until his hand tightened around the green fabric that was softer than he had expected.

“I’ll get him out of there. If it costs me my life, I will get him outta there. I promise it to you. He will be safe and sound even if that is the last thing I do.” Slowly, he pulled the fabric away from the man’s closed fists, making sure to keep eye contact with him.

“Please bring him home. He doesn’t deserve to end like this,” Alan met Peter’s eyes again slowly, and as those old eyes met his, Peter nodded immediately. He knew that he had to help Juno, but having someone who cared so much about the Deputy tell him to save him, spurred him on.

“I won’t let that happen, don’t worry.” He pulled the bandana to his face and tied it around his head so it obscured his mouth and nose. He took a deep breath. The fabric smelled of old lavender and mothballs. Old dried blood and sand. It wasn’t a pleasant smell in any shape or form, but it was a necessary one. “Now, if you wouldn’t mind me asking, you don’t potentially have a gun I could borrow?”

Alan looked up in confusion for a second before his face twisted into understanding. Slowly he stood up and disappeared back into the same room that he had been in before, emerging a few seconds later with a calibre.

“It’s only got six bullets, but I think you can make do.”

Peter nodded, holstering the weapon with familiar movements. “You know I will.”

He turned on his heel to leave and had almost reached the door when he turned his head. “Thank you, once again.”

The man waved it off, but started speaking seconds later. “Pay me back with actually coming back and taking my offer of becoming a doctor, will you?”

And with the man’s words, Peter’s brain supplied his longings again, the scene of him and Juno waking up next to one another, getting ready for their separate jobs. Living a normal life. The idea was suddenly so close that he could grasp it, he just had to try.

“I can’t promise you anything,” he grinned and headed out.

Ruby was drinking from a water trough a few feet away when he emerged. The sun was still hot and burning and Peter, well, Peter was ready.

With determined steps he walked to Ruby, mounting her quickly and steering her back the way that they had come from.

“Alright girl, let's make sure this isn’t our final ride, shall we?” and with that, they rode off.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is going up tomorrow!!

Thank you all for commenting and letting me know what you think, I appreciate it greatly!

Btw! You can find me on Tumblr and on Twitter under Justthingstbh!

I always tweet out when I post the next chapter and I'm always up for talking about TPP or any podcast!

Death Rides a Horse

Chapter Notes

> Wooooooooo! We are getting so close to the ending!!! I'm excited
>
> Thank you Fafsernir for betaing once again, you are the absolute best!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Juno didn't know how long he had slept, and when he woke up, the basement felt warmer than it had that morning, but Juno had never felt this cold in the basement. Even though the air was warm, he felt cold, a gnawing cold that bit at his bones and pulled on his skin.

Whether it was actually cold or just the loneliness and knowledge that Peter was probably already dead, it didn't matter. All that he knew was that there were goosebumps on his arms and no matter how often he rubbed his hands over them, they wouldn't go away.

For the first time since he was brought into this basement, he woke up alone. He woke up to an empty room, that suddenly felt so big that it could swallow him whole without even trying.

The entire time that he had been here with Nureyev, the thought that he might die here had crossed his mind a lot of times, but he had never been as certain of it as he was in this moment.

"Great, I bought that spot next to Ben for nothing then, huh?" he tried to joke but even though he made the joke himself, it didn't even land for him.

Just as his stomach started to growl, he heard a key turning in the lock of his door and he was almost excited to get his hands on one of

those hard pieces of bread, until he saw that the guard who had walked in didn't have a tray in his hand. The green bandana that he had gotten so accustomed to seeing was almost a symbol of terror for Juno. He had already lost someone due to the colour of that fabric and he couldn't comprehend that he had to lose another one. And, now, he would lose himself.

The guy beckoned Juno to stand up with a single wave of his hand, and Juno complied. He already knew that it was worse if he didn't. So he got up as fast as his aching muscles let him and let himself be put in the shackles which had already left deep cuts in his hands, that he knew were going to scar, if he would ever heal enough for them to do so, that was.

He walked in front of the man, a gun pushing into his back as if he still had enough energy to fight back, and Juno had to stifle a snort.

After walking through the slim corridors, he saw the room that he had spent way too much time in for his liking and, just the fact of knowing that he would have to walk inside of it made the hairs on his back stand up.

He wanted to do nothing more but to run away, but he couldn't. There was nowhere to go. No one to survive for. Rita would be sad, he thought for a second, but then again, there was no way for him to get out of here.

So he walked into the room the only way he could: with his head raised up high, not letting his sore muscles and his wounds stop him from carrying himself in a way that pretended that he was fine.

He sat down on the chair, as he had countless times before, waiting for the shackles to be removed from his hands, and his hands being strapped onto the armrests of the chair. The man who tied him to the

chair was quick and trained with his work, tightening the thick leather without an issue, it looked like he didn't even have to think about it anymore.

And Juno thought about how his death will be just another day to these people, just another body to clean up, just another thing to take care off.

He watched as the man left the room without once looking back at him. The short moments of quiet and solitude were appreciated, he used them to think about what he would be doing at that moment if he wasn't here. If he was at home. He would be sitting in the sheriff's office probably, complaining about paperwork, listening to Alessandra talk about her girlfriend to Rita, who was drinking up the romance with big eyes. He knew that if he was there, he wouldn't be appreciating it. They would probably be talking so loud that he couldn't focus on his work or something like that.

He released a breath, let his head fall back against the back of the chair and stared at the ceiling, thinking about everything that he should have done.

There were the obvious things, like telling Rita that he appreciated her, or talking to his colleagues more, but there was something in his chest that tightened at the thought of Nureyev.

There was something there, something that was more than just being stuck together. Juno couldn't name it, but something was clawing at the base of his throat at the thought of the thief being dead.

He didn't get to think more about that feeling though, as the door to the room was abruptly opened by the woman who had brought him into this mess.

After around five days in the basement, he had finally learned her name. They called her The Piranha and apparently she was Miasma's most trusted assistant.

The only thing that Juno knew was that she was almost as terrible as Miasma herself, but only almost. At least, she normally kept her mouth shut while torturing him. Miasma would always talk.

"Hello Juno, did you sleep well?" she drawled out, a grin on her face as Juno watched her as she prepared a syringe.

"Could have been better," he answered. After a while, he had given up on trying to fight it all, trying to get back at them with witty insults. He had gotten tired.

"I will only grace you with my presence for a while, Steel. Appreciate it while you can," she grinned, as he watched her take out a contraption that he didn't know, but knew that was probably going to hurt him.

"Aw, that's a shame, I always enjoy our talks. Looking at your deformation of a face always gives me hope that my ugly mug isn't that bad." To her credit, she laughed at that.

"You really have no idea what's good for you, do you?" She grinned, her teeth jutting out of her mouth in a way that Juno could only call predatory.

"I think nothing in this room could ever be good for me, so I'm just working with the situation at hand," he stumbled at the last words, as he felt the needle pierce his skin on his arm. The contraption in The Piranha's hands started to make sounds that Juno didn't want to interpret as sucking sounds, but there was no other way to describe

them.

“Well, you have more survival instinct than I thought, Steel,” the woman smiled out, before moving to leave the room. “She’ll be here soon,” were the last words that the woman spoke before she left the room.

He wasn’t alone for long, just like before, the door was thrown open and this time, Miasma walked in with an assistant. Miasma looked the same as she always did, her brown shaggy hair pulled into a tight ponytail, her eyes just a little too crazy for Juno’s liking and her clothes so clean that he doubted that she actually ever left this house.

The assistant looked similar to the others, bandana over half of his face. He was short, muscular and carried himself in a way that told Juno that Miasma had told him just one too many times that he was in the way or that he was annoying. His shoulders were hunched and his eyes stayed mostly on the ground.

“How much has he lost already?” Miasma asked conversationally to the assistant that Juno knew couldn’t answer. He had seen one of them without a bandana once, he had asked him why he didn’t have one and instead of an answer, the man had pushed out the stump that he called his tongue out of his mouth, before putting on his bandana. He had never heard any of them speak, so he assumed that all of them had this procedure done to them.

He couldn’t see the assistant behind him, but as he heard Miasma say “Oh, five per cent already, this is faster than expected, turn it up anyway. I don’t have all day,” he knew that he must have held up his fingers.

“Are you planning on telling me what you’re doing?” Juno growled out as he felt the pull get harsher.

“I once heard that people die when they lose fifty per cent of their blood. That their hearts just stop and so I thought, if I was going to kill you, might as well figure out if it’s true, with such a willing guinea pig,” she spoke without any actual emotion, if not for a smile that ghosted on her lips.

Juno wanted to answer, but he felt his body getting weaker, he felt sweat start to pool at his neck.

“Just stay quiet Juno, and let me enjoy the show.”

And for the first time in all of his stay here, he followed her commands.

He didn’t have the energy to talk back, not anymore.

Time was a thing that Juno Steel had lost awareness over the second he had walked into the basement. So he wasn’t sure how long it took until his breathing started to speed up, until he started to feel colder.

“Fifteen per cent,” Miasma mentioned and Juno watched how the assistant walked out behind the woman. “I heard a lot of people lose consciousness when they lose twenty per cent of their blood, so I told him to get me a book, so I won’t get bored while I watch you die.”

Juno wasn’t sure what was real anymore. He knew that he saw the assistant come back, but he was taller now. Thinner, not as muscular. Did they have a shift? Did they have breaks?

He wanted to ask about it, but he remembered that they were all muted. So he just watched the man walk by him, checking on the amount of blood that Juno had lost absentmindedly.

There was a familiar scent in the air as the man stopped beside him, something that Juno vaguely remembered as if he had smelled it once upon a time.

A soft sound of the man clearing his throat and his arms moving upwards was enough to get Miasma's attention.

"Twenty, my my, look at you Juno, still with us. Well, you won't be for long, any last words?" she grinned out, and Juno saw her eyes focusing on his as she asked.

He closed his eyes for a second as his vision got blurrier, before he opened them again. "I just, really want you to die," he murmured.

Miasma snorted for a second. "Using his last words to wish me death, how unoriginal," she walked towards the door and turned around flamboyantly to look at him. "And here I was, thinking that you might have a single drop of personality in you. Well, it seems like I was wrong. Goodbye, Juno St-"

It had happened too quickly, Juno hadn't seen where the knife had come from, he didn't know what happened, he only saw the blood flowing from her throat and closed his eyes, he didn't need to see that. Also, he was slowly getting really tired, but he needed to stay awake.

A warm hand suddenly touched his arm carefully to pull out the needle, immediately applying pressure on the wound to stop the blood flow.

He groaned in pain when he felt a piece of fabric being tightened around his arm, before the telltale sounds of the leather fastenings opening told him he was free.

“What are you doing?” he mumbled, his vision blurry and his brain so empty that he had the feeling that he wouldn’t even be able to grasp a thought right now if he tried.

“It’s okay, go to sleep, Juno. I will take care of it all,” he knew that voice from somewhere. Not sure where he knew it from, but the familiarity allowed him to close his eyes and fall into the depths of unconsciousness before he could even try to fight it.

The first time Juno gained consciousness again, he felt a horse moving under him and an arm around his middle, holding him tightly against a warm chest.

He pushed himself tighter against the person behind him basking in the body heat that warmed his bones.

When he opened his eyes, he saw an arm that was holding the reins of the dark brown horse that he and the mystery person rode. He trailed that arm with his eyes and saw dozens of wounds, from burns to cuts that hadn’t completely healed yet, but the ones that made him feel the most were the ones around the person’s wrist. Two long parallel running lines, small indents that he shared. The wounds of the shackles of the cave.

“Nureyev?” he whispered. Not believing his eyes.

“Yes, Juno. You’ve lost a lot of blood, you should try to sleep,” the all too familiar voice spoke and Juno couldn’t stop himself from smiling. He was definitely dead, Nureyev would have been hanged this morning and Juno doubted that he had survived being bled out. So he just moved closer to the man behind him and let himself fall back asleep.

The blanket that was on top of him the next time he woke up was warm, too warm and Juno tried to move it, to little avail. But he managed to free one of his legs and that helped with the warmth under the blanket. He didn’t have the energy to move so he stayed in the bed.

As he got tired again, he suddenly started hearing voices. There were two, both male and both familiar.

“Have you slept today? This is the first time that I see you move away from his bedside since you two arrived.” Doc. So that meant he wasn’t dead or, at least, if he was, then Doc must have died too and he doubted that.

“I slept,” the other voice answered and Juno knew that it was Nureyev. He knew that lilt, he knew the sound of that voice better than he knew a lot of things. “I even ate something today, much to your surprise. I just... don’t like to leave him alone.”

Juno wanted to stay awake, but he could feel consciousness slipping from him once again.

“Ransom, I will tell you the second Juno is awake. You don’t need to

stay in that chair all day."

Juno didn't get to hear the rest of that conversation as he fell asleep once again.

The next time that Juno woke up, he heard an audible sigh of relief next to him. He turned his head towards the sound and was met with the smiling face of Peter Nureyev.

He tried to smile back, but the thief turned his face away to yell over his shoulder. "Alan! He's awake," his voice was calm and oh so beautiful.

"Hey," Juno croaked, trying to move his hand to take Peter's hand into his and as he didn't manage to get close enough, the thief took pity on him and took his hand into his.

"Hey Juno," he spoke, his finger drawing small circles on the back of Juno's hand. "How are you feeling, darling?"

Juno only groaned in pain and he heard Peter's small snort.

"I'll take that as an answer," Peter smiled, just as the door opened and Doc walked in.

"Juno! There you are, awake and everything!" the old man smiled, but Juno couldn't be happy about seeing him as he felt Peter let go of his hand.

Nureyev stood up from the chair to offer it to the older man, who gratefully took it. “So, Juno, feeling alright? Does it hurt anywhere? Are you still dizzy?”

He couldn’t process all the questions that the man asked, he was too busy watching Peter walk to the wall next to the door to lean on it. He was patched up in a lot of places, the pushed-up sleeves of his shirt revealing cuts and bruises that Juno wanted to count, to see how often he would have to… He dismissed that thought quickly. Instead of looking at Nureyev, he tried to listen to Doc.

The older man started to make all kinds of tests. Testing his blood pressure, taking his pulse, his reaction time.

It was only when Juno yawned loudly that he let off. “I will bring you some food and then you go back to sleep. Understood, Steel?” The Doc grinned and Juno nodded carefully. His eyes looked at Nureyev who was still sitting in the corner of the room, sharpening his blades.

He watched as the thief smiled at him, switching to another blade as Juno ate the soup that Doc had provided for him, while only half-listening to Doc ramble about his condition.

His head swam too much to be able to really listen, his thoughts all over the place and his tiredness consuming him once again, so he finished his soup quickly, before lying down again.

Before his head even hit the pillow, he was out.

The next time that he woke up, Peter was gone.

Chapter End Notes

Next two chapters are going up **Tomorrow**

Btw! You can find me on Tumblr and on Twitter under Justthingstbh!
I always tweet out when I post the next chapter and I'm always up for talking about TPP or any podcast!

You've Got Mail

Chapter Summary

An invitation.

Chapter Notes

So folks, we are getting close to the end! Only three more chapters!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Juno was sitting in the small office that he had in the Sheriff station, his wounds had closed and scarred over and his shoulder still ached when it rained, but it was getting better. But every time the wounds ached or he saw the scars littering his abdomen, the only thing he could think about was that damn thief. Perseus Shah, Rex Glass or whatever his real name was. It didn't matter, because Juno had let him slip away. On purpose, as well.

He cracked his neck and refocused on the papers that were laying in front of him. Multiple wanted posters, mostly low-level criminals, nothing compared to him.

But as he was stretching, he got a whiff of that cologne that was still wafting off his jacket from where he had been pressed against the other, barely conscious as they rode Ruby 7 away from that horrible place.

Juno hated that he could still smell the man around him, that he sometimes had the feeling that he heard his voice. But what he hated most was the stomach-dropping feeling he got when he thought about the fact that the smell would fade one day.

He was pulled from his thoughts when someone knocked on his door.

“Boss? You in there?” Rita’s voice called from outside and Juno felt a small smile rain over his face.

“Yeah, Rita. Where else would I be?” he said, fake annoyance in his tone as Rita opened the door to his office.

“Well, sheesh Boss, I’m sorry, was just checking. I got mail for you.”

Rita was always like a balm for his sore soul. Her happy go-lucky-attitude was something he appreciated, even if he didn’t say it often. Said it never, if he was quite honest with himself. He knew that he needed her though, he wasn’t sure where he would be without her.

She walked towards him while sorting through the letters that she held in her hand. Most people that worked at the Sheriff’s office let their postage be sent there, mostly due to the fact that Rita was almost always there if one of them was out on a case, or just doing whatever, so they would never miss the post carriage.

“Only got the one for you today,” she smiled as she handed him the letter. The address of the sheriff’s station was written in beautiful, almost calligraphic, handwriting. He took out his knife to slip it in to cut open the letter when he noticed that Rita was still standing there. Watching him. So he decided to out opening the letter on hold.

“Rita, do you mind?” he asked in a kind of annoyed tone, this time not faking the annoyance.

“Well, yeah Boss, it’s not like you get mail often and that is definitely not the handwriting of the people who normally send you letters, so you can’t judge me for being a little curious.”

Juno sighed. “Curiosity killed the cat, Rita.”

“Yeah yeah and satisfaction brought it back, now would you please just open it, Boss?”

He set the letter down, stuck his knife into the table - it was old, so he didn’t mind - and leaned back in his chair, propping his feet up onto the letter, so that she couldn’t grab it.

A smug grin painted itself on his face as he put his right hand on the back of his head, pretending to have all the time in the world.

“You’re the worst, Mistah Steel,” Rita pouted, before walking out of his office. As soon as the door closed behind her, though, Juno let his chair fall back forward, grabbing the letter with one hand and the knife with the other.

His hands froze when a familiar scent hit him. There was no doubt that it came from the letter. He had smelt it when Rita had brought it in, but he had honestly thought that it was a trick that his brain was playing on him.

The knife slipped between the paper carefully but with purpose and Juno swallowed, before he slowly, almost meditatively, pulled his knife through the paper. The sound of it ripping mixed with his own heartbeat in his ears.

As the paper cut, more and more of the familiar scent hit him and Juno felt like he was intoxicated.

He let the knife fall onto the table when the letter was finally open, but he didn’t pull out the paper.

Why? He didn't quite know, his heart was beating so loudly in his chest that he was surprised that Rita hadn't come in and checked up on him yet, asking why he was banging against the door.

What was he afraid of? Was he even afraid? Or was he regretting letting that man go?

Juno took a deep breath, before pulling out the letter with such care, worried it might shatter like glass. The thought made him smile for a second before he held that letter in his fingers, letting the tips of them caress the thick paper.

And, then, suddenly, with an impatience he didn't expect from himself, he unfolded it, releasing a thin piece of paper that smelled of the man that he had let go.

Juno,

I was quite certain that the moment I left you, lying in that small hospital bed, was the moment that I would last see your face, but I was wrong. I have been seeing your face ever since. I ride through towns and sometimes I need to do a double-take, making sure it isn't you who just walked past me.

I'm pretty sure that I will never see you again, but I do hope that I am wrong. It would be quite an adventure, if you are willing to join me.

I should be passing by Hyperion City in around a month. Meet me on the last slivers of sunshine on the last Sunday of the next month, if you want to come with me.
You know where.

Signed,

Your better half,

Peter Nureyev.

Juno didn't remember how many times he reread that letter. How many times he folded and unfolded it just to read it again. He only knew that it was safe in the pocket of his coat, the edges soft from his touch, the folds fragile and it would stay there, for a month.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is going up **Tonight**
You can find me on Tumblr and on Twitter under Justthingstbh!
If you want to talk at all, I am always open to it!

Decisions of a Lifetime

Chapter Summary

Questions, friends and confrontations.

Chapter Notes

So, we are so close to the end, so close but yet so far.

Thank you all for being here and commenting and being just all in all the best

A big shoutout once again to the lovely Fafsernir for betaing, she's the best!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A month had passed, and every time that Juno put on his coat, or pushed his hands in his pockets, he was haunted by the ghost of the thief.

Haunted by a smell, a touch, a feeling in his heart that he just couldn't let go of. He was being haunted by a memory that he was almost able to grasp. That he would be able to grasp tonight, if he decided to do so.

The choice was his and his alone, and if he was being honest with himself, he didn't know what to choose.

Hyperion city needed him, that was at least what he told himself. There were people here who would be doing pretty damn badly if it wasn't for him and he had only ever seen Nureyev for a few days.

He was turning ideas over and over in his head so much that they were basically just spinning, while he brushed Small Fry's fur. It was something that calmed him, it reminded him that he was needed. Even if it was just a horse, whom anyone could be tending to, it was

his responsibility and that is when it hit him.

Anyone could be making sure that Hyperion city was safe, but he had taken it upon himself for a reason. He had given himself that goal for a reason.

And now he wasn't sure if that reason was enough to stay.

So he did what anyone would do when they were unsure about a decision, he got a drink. The sun hadn't even set yet, he still had around 4 hours until he would have to be there. He knew that it would take him two hours of normal riding, one and a few minutes if he pushed Small Fry to a gallop.

He downed his second bottom shelf whiskey with a sign, slamming the glass on the counter, almost, but not enough to break it. Mick, who was slowly drying one of the glasses just stared at him.

"You alright there JayJay? Haven't seen you so bummed out in a while," his friend said carefully, Juno didn't look at him.

"You ever had to make a decision that could change everything, and you just have no idea what to do?"

Mick was quiet for a second, something that didn't happen often. Then he broke into his ramblings again. "I mean, yeah. Last time when I got a haircut was kinda like that. I love the long hair, but I wanted short hair and it was just, so confusing and irritating for a while that I just didn't get it cut. Still haven't. Can't decide."

Juno only sighed, his eyes focused on the reflection of himself in the

little bit of liquid left in his glass. He felt sick. He could barely look at himself.

“What if you had two hours to make that decision Mercury? What if time was running so quickly and you couldn’t grip a single thought?”

“I suppose I’d just go and see. Check what strikes me as right in the moment, you know?”

With that, the Deputy stood up, sat his glass down and threw his leather duster on. “Thank you, Mick. That sounds like a good idea.”

As Juno walked away, he heard Mick mumble a soft “You never called any of my ideas good before.”

A smiled painted itself on Juno’s face and he walked on, getting ready to face the decision of his life time.

He had just tightened the belly strap of Small Fry’s saddle when a familiar voice called out to him.

“Boss? What are you up to?” Rita asked in her usual chipper tone. But when Juno turned around and saw her look at the bag that he had strapped to Small Fry, her mood changed. “Why are you taking your bedroll, Boss?” Her voice was quiet, fragile.

She was scared.

“Rita-” Juno started, a hand still lying on his saddle, the other limp at his side. He couldn’t look at her. If he was honest with himself, it was her that he couldn’t let go of. She would be the hardest to leave, the biggest buffer in this insane plan that Nureyev had made.

“Mistah Steel? Where are you going?” the short woman asked, but before he could answer she put up a hand. “Forget that one, when are you coming back?”

The deputy only took a deep breath, his hand leaving Small Fry, only to wrap his arms around her. They had never really hugged before, Juno wasn’t big on touching normally. Rita was, but Juno never really reciprocated her touches. And she had respected his personal space, always making sure to wait before she touched his shoulder or even just gave him a handshake.

She was his best friend and she didn’t even know.

“I don’t know if I’ll ever be back,” he whispered, feeling her arms pull tighter around his back and he wanted to cry.

“You never took me dancing,” she whispered back, but her voice was laced with the faint sound of tears.

Juno made a small sound of confusion and pulled back, looking at her. The tears that were already drying on her cheeks were joined by new ones every few seconds and that made Juno break too. He cried silently, not wanting to interrupt her.

“Two years ago, we had to go to Khan’s wedding, remember Boss? And you and I, we watched them dance and I said that I couldn’t dance and you said that you’d show me some time and then I bugged you aaaall night, but you just didn’t want to so I let it go, but then you

got drunk and I asked you again and you promised me that you'd show me and you haven't yet so you can't leave. You can't break a pinky promise, Boss! You just can't. Frannie told me that they used to cut people's pinkies off when they broke the promise and I really don't want to have to do that to you, just because you decided to run off!" She had silent tears falling from her eyes the entire time while she told that story and Juno wiped some of them away carefully.

"I'll come back, Rita, I promise. There is just something I must do first." He held out a pinky, and Rita interlocked hers with his. "Pinky promise."

"Alright, but if you aren't in your office by noon tomorrow, Mistah Steel, I'll cut off your pinky, if I find you or not."

Juno snorted at that. "You're the best tracker in the entire country if you want me in the office by noon and I'm not there you'll have found me by two at the latest, so I'll make sure to be on time. Don't want to lose my pinkies."

He let his hand rest on her shoulder and squeezed softly. "I'll be back. And if not, you have all the permission to cut off my fingers."

"And I'll use that permission," she retorted with a sad smile on her face.

"I have to leave now, I can't be late."

While he turned away, he heard Rita wipe her eyes once more, just the slightest ruffling of the fabric, but it was enough for him to know. He mounted Small Fry with practised ease, giving her permission to move before he stopped at the end of the stable looking out at the city in front of him.

“Hey, Rita?”

“Yeah Boss?”

He turned around to smile at her. “You’re my best friend.”

She let out a short laugh at that. “And you’re mine, now go do what you have to do.”

Juno arrived a few moments before the sunset. He walked into the cave, his shoulders squared and his entire frame illuminated by the last rays of sun that signaled the end of the day.

“I knew that getting you here in this lighting would be a good idea,” he heard from behind him and as he turned around, he saw the golden blades of sunlight illuminating Nureyev’s face in a way that made him so much more handsome.

The man flashed him a smile, the teeth poking out before he walked past Juno to the small fire that was already burning. Firewood in his arms.

Juno was glued to that spot, he had the feeling that he couldn’t move, that he was wrong here, but it was also wrong to leave, so he just watched Nureyev throw a piece of wood into the fire.

The thief pulled out a deck of cards and motioned across from him.

“Will you sit down and play one game for me? For old times sake?”

The hope in his voice was what got Juno to move his feet.

He walked over, sitting down in the exact same spot that he had sat at all those months ago. His hand moved to his shoulder unconsciously. The skin on top had already healed, but he could feel that the muscle inside was still aching, not completely recovered, so he tried to keep it still most of the time.

He would have died without Nureyev.

The man in question, his saviour, was lazily shuffling the cards in his lap. It wasn’t a full deck and Juno noticed that it was the same deck that they had played with a month ago.

“Your first question, Juno Steel?” Nureyev smiled and held out half the deck to the Deputy, who took it gratefully.

“Why did you tell me your name?” Juno asked without hesitation. The question had been bugging him for a month now. Why him- what made him worthy of knowing it?

“Ah, a good one. What made you come here?”

Locked eyes. Cards drawn.

Nureyev drew a 2 of Hearts. Juno a 3 of Diamonds. Ripped up and eaten by the fire.

“You’re special, Juno. Even if you don’t want to see it and I know that when you look at yourself you tend to close your eyes when it comes to important things. Why did you come here?”

Juno was stunned for a second. He wasn’t special. Yes, he was good with a gun, but otherwise, he was boring. He was nothing compared to Nureyev.

“Why did you tell me that you’d be here?”

Juno pulled a Jack of hearts. Nureyev an 8 of clubs.

Nureyev took a deep breath before he answered. “You make me-” he looked to the side, not looking at the lawman in front of him. “You make me feel things, Juno. Things I haven’t felt in a long time.”

Juno took their cards, ripped them up and threw them into the fire. His heart was beating so loudly that he was surprised that Nureyev couldn’t hear it.

“What kind of things?” Juno asked, his hand already playing with the edge of the next card.

“Do I make you feel things too?” Nureyev asked, his voice careful, worry laced in it and before they even pulled the cards, Juno knew his answer to that question.

He had known that he had felt things for Nureyev for multiple months now. It was the only way that he could explain the fact that he still smiled when a whiff of that man wafted up from his coat, or how his heart had raced coming here. Or how he sometimes imagined that he saw black slicked-back hair and a dangly earring before strangers

came into focus. None of them ever compared to Peter. Of course, they didn't. He had lifted the bar so high that most people would be able to walk under it, without even noticing that there was a bar.

But there was no way that Juno could tell the man that. The man who was staring at him with those deep eyes that Juno wished he could get lost into, that he wanted to stare into each morning. He had never thought himself to be a romantic person, and he never had been, up until he had seen those eyes, that smile. Until he had seen Nureyev for what he was. He hadn't known how deep brown could be until he had drowned in those eyes.

Juno pulled a card from his deck, his eyes trailed on the thick paper between his calloused fingers, as he flipped an eight of spades. His eyes flickered upwards, meeting Peter's. The man was holding a four of diamonds.

As he took the card from Juno's fingers, he felt the warmth radiating from the other's skin and Juno wanted to chase it with his hands, with his lips. He wanted to be embraced in that warmth. But the warmth was gone before Juno could do anything, so he just watched as those fingers that had killed, that had stolen, that had caressed his cheek as he had been thrown back into the basement after Miasma had beaten him to a pulp, ripped up the cards and threw them into the fire.

Peter didn't speak and Juno didn't push him to. He understood how hard this must be for the thief, for the man who didn't even let people close enough to know his real name, to suddenly be attached to someone.

The thief didn't meet his eyes for almost an entire minute, his mouth pulled downwards, until he let out a shaky laugh and turned his head to look at the Deputy. Those eyes pinning Juno in place, without a single possibility to move.

“Well, Juno. To be completely honest with you, I think I am in love with you and it terrifies me to my core.”

The Deputy didn’t answer. He didn’t say anything for what felt like years to Peter. So he just put a careful smile on his face, moved his hand over his slicked-back hair and met Juno’s eyes.

That’s how long it took for him to build a wall, to build up what Juno Steel had destroyed with his kind words and loving touches. With his care and his smile and that damn laugh.

It took him just long enough to pull himself together.

So he smiled his smile, guarded, hidden, but almost indistinguishable from his real one. At least he thought so, until Juno put his hand on his cards again and asked another question.

“Why?”

Peter just swallowed, he could deal with this, he could deal with rejection. So he remembered the question that he normally asked in the beginning of this game, when he had less interesting people in front of him than Juno Steel.

“What’s the biggest lie you've ever told?”

His fingers were shaking as he pulled his card. His eyes never leaving Juno’s. Those dark eyes.

Peter pulled a King of Clubs. Juno a ten of diamonds.

Juno didn't answer, until suddenly, in a quiet, unfaltering voice, the deputy stated: "I think my biggest lie was that I said I didn't love you."

The wall inside Peter crumbled, those careful words had more power of destruction than all the dynamite in the world.

"Can I kiss you?" Peter's lips let slip out before the man could think about his words.

It was only because his words were so quiet, that he heard Juno's question.

"Would you kiss me?"

Peter couldn't help but let out a chuckle at that, before straightening his back and flourishing his fingers dramatically to pick up his card.

Juno rolled his eyes and sighed, but there was something in those eyes that Peter could only describe as love.

Peter pulled a King of Hearts, Juno a Queen of Clubs.

The Deputy smiled with a softness in his eyes that Peter had never seen before, as he said the word. "Yes. I want you to."

The normally carefully ripped up cards were ignored as Peter moved forward quickly. He took the card from Juno's fingers, before throwing it into the fire with his own. His hand found the back of the other's neck, and for just a second, they locked eyes.

Staring into each other, while their cards burned. While they were consumed by fire, Peter closed his eyes and kissed Juno.

It started out gentle, just a soft brush of their lips. But then Juno placed his hands around Peter's neck, pulling him closer. He quickly deepened the kiss with an easy tilt of the head and Juno had the feeling that he hadn't been alive for his entire life.

Life was breathed into him as those lips as soft as silk touched his, as he felt the small hairs on the back of Peter's neck.

The kiss wasn't out of the ordinary per se. It really wasn't. It was a kiss, Juno had kissed many people before, in many different ways. But as those lips parted so that Peter could gently bite his bottom lip he knew that he was addicted. That he was addicted to that scent, to the feel of Peter's skin under his hands, the sound of Peter's voice in his ears.

Everything about Peter Nureyev killed him in the best way possible, yet made him feel alive for the first time in years.

[image][image]

They broke apart, for only a second. A second so crucial as Juno opened his eyes and had the feeling that he finally saw the meaning to this mess of a life that he had lead.

There was a meaning to those love struck eyes, there was a meaning to those lips. Those lips soft as silk, so soft that Juno had the feeling that he was never going to tire of kissing them.

Life's meaning wasn't to fall in love with Peter Nureyev, no, of course not. He was his own person, he had his own goals in life. He had his pains and his hardships and his obligations, but he would have been lying if he had said that looking into those eyes didn't give all that

pain a reason, all those wrong decisions, all those broken promises a purpose. Because it had led him here. Into this cave, under that gaze that struck him in more ways than one.

Juno closed his eyes again, feeling overwhelmed by the way that Peter was searching his face, his eyes for the same meaning that Juno had just found in Peter's. So he just moved in again, let his lips feel that soft skin, let his thoughts that were running marathons be stilled by the taste of the other's lips on his.

They kissed for as long as they were able to, in the beginning, their kisses were soft and precise, until Peter pulled the Deputy closer, fisting his hands into the other's shirt. They kissed like nothing else mattered, as if the only thing they needed to live was under their lips, in the warmth of the other.

But even lovers need to breathe, and Juno pulled away a second time to take a breath that he wished he didn't need, just so he could keep kissing this man until he died of old age.

He noticed, in the moment that Peter carefully placed his hand on Juno's cheek, that he had been starving all of his life. He had been starving until he had been allowed to taste this man's lips against his. Until he had gotten to feel the warmth of his body against his.

And he also knew that the minute that he left, he'd be starving again.

"Juno?" Peter whispered in a voice so akin to worship that it made Juno's heart clench in his chest, as he knew that he would have to leave again. "Would you come with me?"

And this was it, wasn't it? His big decision. His mother had said that every great person had one of those. A moment where a single

sentence, hell, a single word could decide life and death.

What is death to a starving lady, but a way to skip the horror of a slow demise?

So he searched for purchase in those eyes, trying to find something to cling to, while he felt his mind and body run from him. He wanted nothing more than to go with Peter, or to have him stay, but he couldn't. He had obligations, he had people that needed protecting. He had Rita and Mick and he had Ben's grave. Who'd take care of them when he was gone?

There was no one.

So he blinked the tears that started to cloud his eyes away and spoke his truth. His truth that would not only kill him, but Peter as well.

"I want to, I do. But I can't," his voice was barely audible, just loud enough for himself and Peter to hear. Almost as if those words had tried to stay inside of him, his body, that was craving to be with the other in every way possible, while his brain told him it could never be.

Peter just smiled, slowly raising a hand to cup Juno's cheek. His eyes behind the glasses were filled with tears and Juno wanted to make them disappear, wanted to make the man smile. God, he wanted to make Peter happy in every way that he could, but this one was not one that he could actually do.

This one was too hard for him to achieve, something impossible that he wanted to grasp and pull close to him, like he had pulled Peter to him just a few minutes ago. But this was too far away, his arms were not long enough. It was like reaching for the stars. Reaching up into

the dark tapestry littered with those dreams and hopes that were long lost, looking down upon us fondly, like an old friend. A friend that wanted the best for you but fate decided that the best for you wasn't what you wanted. She made the hard decisions, in the end. Not you. And fate got her way, always.

"I understand, Juno. I really do. You don't have to explain yourself," Peter spoke with a voice so soft, so careful, as if he was talking to a small bird that was about to take its first flight, or a kitten hiding under a bed. And Juno had the feeling that he really did understand, in his own twisted way, Nureyev understood.

Wasn't that what had drawn Juno to him in the first place? That somewhere, deeply hidden under obligations and expectations, they were the same. Two broken souls, looking for another to heal them.

To be pulled apart by fate so cruelly was a worse torture than everything they had gone through together. But it wasn't fate, was it? It was expectations and obligations. Everything that held them apart from each other was the things that they put on themselves.

In the end, though, both of them were too stubborn, too blind, too stupid to see the possibilities.

In the end, the only thing they were, was scared. So Juno stared at the man that he had come to love, examined the bridge of his nose that was slightly offset now, compare to the first time he had seen him. It was the smallest detail, but Juno could tell, Juno could see. Juno knew that Miasma had broken the thief's nose. He had been the one to set it right.

But it wasn't just Peter who was changed forever by their encounters. Hell, Peter had saved his life, the first time they had met. The scar on his shoulder itched at the memory and he suppressed the need to scratch it.

They had been changed. By the world, by Miasma and, in the end, by each other. And now, they were going to go back to their lives, they might be lonely and missing something but they were still their lives and both of them had a place to fill in the grand scheme of fate. Both of them had their cues and their lines and both of them had an end written out for them, they just didn't know it.

"Nureyev, I-" Juno started and he saw how those brown eyes caught his gaze again, timid, careful and soft. Caring. "I was ready to die for you, back in that basement, when they took you, I was ready to fight my way out and-"

"I know," Peter interrupted him, his face pulled into something so soft that Juno couldn't pinpoint it, and if he had been pressed to do so, he would have called it love. "That's why I told you not to. You were going to get yourself killed, and I would rather die than see you injured."

"I was ready to die for you, but I can't. I'm not ready to leave this place yet, they need me. It took me a long time to accept that, but now that I have. I can't leave." Juno felt tears sting in his eyes, begging for the release that he wasn't willing to give.

Peter took Juno's trembling hands into his and Juno wanted to hold them until the last beat of his heart. "I'd stop the world if it gave us time, Juno. But I, too, have a place to fill, I won't be able to stay. I understand you, I really do," the words came out carefully and mumbled. Nureyev was shaking, and Juno could hear the tremble of his voice. He could feel the way Nureyev's body itched to be close to Juno again, so the Deputy closed his eyes and smiled. Juno carefully moved the hand of the man to his own cheek and tilted his head to kiss it.

"We only have tonight, even if you'd stop the world, we would always

just have tonight," he opened his eyes again to see Nureyev move closer, to see him stare into Juno's eyes. He saw the smile that claimed Nureyev's face, a smile that was sad but happy at the same time. A smile that felt like it lasted a lifetime, before Juno moved forward to taste that smile against his own once again.

He knew that the first rays of sunlight would come, he knew he would untangle their limbs, saddle Small Fry and give Nureyev one last kiss. He knew that he would be starving until the end of time without this man's kisses. Knew that he would never be able to taste that smile again, hear that laugh again and he knew that he would always be hoping to hear it just one last time.

He knew, but Juno had always been good at avoiding things, so he shut off his mind and just felt the gentle lips against his own, the hands that ran up his side in soothing motions. He could cherish this, he had to, because he would never have it again.

Chapter End Notes

The wonderful fanart in this chapter was made the absolutely wonderful Robin Kasznia!! There are wonderful and their art is super gorgeous so you should check it out!!

The next chapter is coming out **tomorrow**!!

You can find me on Tumblr and on Twitter under Justthingstbh!

Flowers on a Graveyard

Chapter Notes

> I want to thank the absolutely lovely Fafsernir for betaing and being there for when I needed to rant about it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It took Juno half a year to stop thinking about what could have been every day.

He tried to get away from the guilty and self-hating bits in himself that told him that he had pushed away his only chance for happiness, and instead tried to find it himself.

And it worked. Most of the time.

He had started talking to a therapist that Doc had recommended. Or Alan, how Juno was supposed to call him now, but that still felt weird, so he didn't. He started to heal, slowly, the wounds of his psyche scabbing over little by little and the urge to scratch and reopen them was strong but he didn't. At least he didn't on the good days.

On the bad days, he'd try to distract himself. Do something for his mind and his body. So the first time that he took Rita dancing came to a shock for both of them, blurted out during a rather heated discussion of her bothering him about having to leave the house. It became a rather common occurrence afterwards. Juno was a good dancer, not as good as Ben, but he was miles better than Rita, so he taught her all that he knew.

Ben was another thing. He visited the grave more often, spoke of happy things instead of just silently drowning himself in self-hatred, pity and alcohol.

It was on one of those days that Juno walked towards his brother's grave. He didn't bring flowers anymore, they were expensive here in the desert and Ben had never been a big fan of them anyway.

When he reached the grave, there was something off about it, something big and strange. The gravestone was cleaner than Juno had left it. Sand had the tendency to stick to the carved out letters and to make their homes in the nooks and crannies of the dark material. But it was clean. Not just that, but on the grave itself, was a bouquet of flowers. They weren't the cheap kind either.

As he got closer to inspect the flowers, he saw that they were made out of cloth. The kind that were so detailed that most people could never afford them unless they sold an arm and a leg to get the money. And he had to admit that they were beautiful. The fine silks mixed with rougher cotton, all dyed and stained in a beautiful array of flowers.

But, that didn’t answer the question of who had left them here. Of who had enough money to place theme here. And, also, he wasn’t sure if he should leave them here. Old Town’s cemetery wasn’t exactly a safe place on the best of days, and especially not when there was a bouquet of fake flowers innocently lying on his brother’s grave that would be more expensive than the amount of money most people here had. Hell, Juno made less money in a month than that thing probably cost.

So, without better judgement, Juno picked it up. It was softer to the touch than he’d expected. The stems of the flowers were firm and Juno guessed that it was thin metal rods wrapped in cloth to give the appearance of stems, and so that people could display them in vases if they wanted to.

It felt wrong, touching it. It was not meant for him, it was meant for Ben. He tried to think whether Ben would have had friends that could have been able to afford such luxury only to let it be taken by the

elements, or more likely, a thief in a cemetery.

“Ben?” He spoke carefully, his voice barely audible, but Ben had always been good at deciphering his emotions, so he doubted that it would be different in death. “Do you know who put this here? Who cleaned your gravestone?”

He stopped to give his brother time to answer, but the only answer that he got was a bit of sand moving in the wind and Juno let out a sigh.

What had he expected, really? Ben was dead, had been dead for years. It didn’t change the fact that Juno liked to come to him for advice, just like he did in the past.

For reasons that Juno still didn't understand, he pressed the flowers to his chest. Almost in a mock hug, a floral aroma hit his nose. The flowers must have been dusted with perfume before being sold and Juno held them closer to his face and took a deep breath.

The first thing that he smelt was the smell of sand, that clung to everything here in the desert, but the strong floral scents under it were a small delight to his senses. He couldn’t pinpoint them, it wasn’t like he ever had actual flowers to smell. This was the closest he had ever gotten to smelling a real flower.

It hit him when he took another smell of the flowers, there was that floral scent and the smell of sand, but there, hiding in the shadows, hiding behind the other scents was that scent that he had missed for half a year now. That he had last smelt on his jacket the morning that he had left that cave.

He almost threw the bouquet onto the ground out of shock, but part of

his brain, his primal thoughts, he would claim later, held onto it. It didn't want to let go of that scent, not again. If he could, he would keep that scent close to him at all times, if someone asked him, he'd deny it, but it wasn't really the scent that he wanted to keep, no. It was the man himself, the source of the scent.

With the utmost care, Juno pressed the flowers to his chest and took a deep breath. He had never thought that he would ever smell that scent again, he had thought that this thing like no other he had ever smelt before had been discarded, thrown out of his life when he made the decision not to go with Nureyev all those months ago.

At the thought of the thief, Juno's heart grew heavy. The flowers were here, yes, his scent was, but the man himself? Well, the man himself was not. He had probably already left town again, only leaving something there to keep Juno hoping, to keep him guessing.

Or maybe, just maybe this wasn't supposed to be on Ben's grave. Maybe some rich man from the next city had sent a delivery boy to bring the flowers and that boy couldn't read well enough to make sure it was the right gravestone and, maybe just maybe that man had the same cologne as Nureyev.

He dragged a hand over his face. That was highly unlikely. What even would be the odds for that?

Nureyev had been here, Juno guessed, at least that was what the evidence suggested, but without proof, this meant nothing. He knew that, he was a deputy, for god's sake. He should know how to investigate a scene.

Gentle fingers touched the cold stone of his brother's grave and Juno used that to centre himself. He knew he would get to the bottom of this. He always did.

So he just smiled at his brother and made his way towards the sheriff's office.

He had a case to solve.

Juno regretted not taking Small Fry home the day before, he would have been a lot quicker. He would have been able to reach the Sheriff's office in less than twenty minutes in a fast canter, but he was on foot, so it took him around an hour.

He wanted to put the blame on Rita, she had convinced him that actually physically exercising and walking himself would help him clear his thoughts better and would help him be in a general better mood and while it did help, he still made her responsible while he tried to jog through the sand before he gave up and walked instead.

If Nureyev was really in Hyperion City, Juno doubted that the man wanted to see him. Juno had pushed him away, had told him that he wouldn't be able to go with him. Why would Nureyev come back to him when Juno was the one to have run away from the opportunity to be with the man?

Or had he only been there to drop off the flowers and had then run again? Had he just been there to trick Juno's heart into reaching out, opening up again, only to leave before he could hide his heart from the world again?

Or was Nureyev settling down with someone else? Someone that was actually good enough that he would stay, that he would be happy? Juno shook his head, banishing those thoughts from his mind.

"I'm good enough too, anyone would be lucky to have me," he repeated the words that Rita had said to him so many times in his head like a mantra. And maybe that was what it was, a mantra to

keep himself from yearning, to keep himself from running into the desert to find the one person that had made him genuinely laugh since Ben died.

Was a second chance too much to ask for?

The worst thing about their separation was that Nureyev had understood, had smiled at him and nodded as Juno listed his fears, his worries, that he had held him so gently that Juno had felt like something worth cherishing for the first time in his life.

Nureyev had told him that it wasn't the last time they would see each other, but what if he had lied? What if he had just said that to make himself feel better? To make sure that Juno wouldn't go out and search for him?

Juno knew that he would rather keep his brain thinking these terrible things, instead of even considering the idea that Nureyev might have come back to see him.

"I'd stop the world if it gave us time," he kept replaying those words in his head. Had the thief really meant it? Or had he stolen Juno's heart with those words with no intention of ever returning it?

Or had he just said those words to play with Juno's mind?

He shook that thought from his head, Nureyev wouldn't do that. He just knew that he wouldn't hurt Juno like that.

He was getting closer to the sheriff station when he noticed that he was still holding the flowers in his hand. For a short second he

considered throwing them into the stables for someone to find them, but he couldn't do that. They were technically evidence and that was the only reason he kept them. If there were other reasons, he wasn't going to share them.

So he kept the flowers in his hand as he pushed open the door, to find Rita sitting behind her desk, startled out of her deep thought.

"Morning Rita," he said quickly, shooting her a smile, while trying to hide the flowers behind his back

"Morning Boss- WAIT!" And that was that for trying to hide them. "Are those flowers? Oh sheesh, Mistah Steel! Where did you get those from? And why? OHHHHHH," she took a comically large gulp of air as she got up from her chair. "ARE THOSE FROM A SECRET LOVER? You legally have to tell me, I'm your best friend. It's the law of the land!"

Juno couldn't help but suppress his smile as he dramatically rolled his eyes. "No, Rita, these are not from a secret lover and I would appreciate it if you would just not bring it up, if you could?"

"Promise me you'd tell me if you were secretly dating a super-rich person from another town?" She asked, holding up her pinky.

He let out a small sigh but walked over and wrapped his pinky around hers. "Promise, now I really need to get to work."

"Sure thing, Mistah Steel," she said, climbing back behind her desk, seemingly calmed down.

Juno walked over to his office, pulling open the door and stopped in his tracks. The flowers in his hand almost fell to the ground, but his hand wasn't responsive enough to actually change the grip right now.

"Oh and boss, there is someone in your office who wanted to see you, related to some case, he said, so I let him wait there," Rita yelled from her desk and Juno just swallowed.

Before him he saw a man, he was tall and thin. He was wearing a smile that was almost as bright as the sun and Juno could still remember how it had felt to kiss that smile, how happy he had been that he had been allowed to do so.

He saw the man's thin arm move upwards to move the black hair that was falling into his eyes out of his face.

"Hello Juno, long time no see."

So, here he was, standing in front of the man that he had left six months ago. The man that he had never stopped thinking about.

"Come on Juno, would you please keep your jaw up from the floor? Not that it makes you any less attractive, it's just a little distracting," he heard Nureyev say, but his mind didn't even register it.

All he knew was that he was moving towards the man. He placed the flowers carefully on his desk, to which he got a small: "So you found them," before he stood right in front of the thief who had stolen his heart and taken it with him all those months ago.

Juno had still not said a single word, he just couldn't believe that he might actually be here, there was no reason to it, no point. But here he was.

"Juno, dear, I really don't want to stress you, but it's making me quite nervous when you don't say anything," The thief muttered, looking down towards his feet. "I understand if you want me to-"

He got interrupted as Juno wrapped his arms around the man and pulled him into a tight hug.

It took Peter a solid three seconds to put his arms around Juno, to close his eyes and just take a deep breath as he tried to scooch even closer.

"I've missed you," Juno whispered into the man's neck and Peter smiled.

"I've missed you too," Peter responded, not even taking a second to reconsider it and Juno grinned.

Juno pulled away from Peter and just stared into his eyes, those eyes that he had gotten lost in months ago and still did now.

"So, what's brought you to town?" he asked, trying to sound casual and failing.

"Well, Juno, someone in this town has something that belongs to me, so I've come to see how it's doing. If it's still intact," Peter smiled out sheepishly.

As Juno looked him over, he saw the scars on his arms, on his face and the only thing he wanted to do was count them with his kisses, making sure that whenever they hurt, he was there to soothe the pain.

"And are you going to stay?" Juno blurted out before he could stop himself and he saw Peter's grin widen. He wanted to punch himself, goddamn, he was an adult and here he was, confronted after months with the man he loved, and the first thing he asked was if he was going to stay. He wanted the floor to open and eat him, but it didn't give him that release.

The thief looked to the ground, not meeting Juno's eyes. "If you'd want me to,-" he took a short breath and before Juno could speak, he started rambling. "I mean, I don't have to. Really, it's fine if not. I managed to get a job with the doc and I'd be staying at the clinic and you have no obligation. Don't think that, you owe me or-"

He stopped himself as Juno put his hand on his cheek, the warmth of the touch warming both of them to the bones. "Nureyev, I want you to stay."

"Ransom," he interjected.

"What?"

"It's Ransom now. I killed off all of my other aliases, but this town knows me as Ransom, just so you know."

Juno's brow furrowed. "Am I supposed to call you Ransom as well?"

Peter let out a chuckle and Juno saw him lift his hand and stop halfway.

“No, Juno. I just wanted to let you know.”

Juno smiled and took his hand off Peter’s cheek and before they could both miss the contact, he reached down and took Peter’s hand into his, linking his fingers with the thieves.

He pointed to the desk with his free hand and gave Peter his best smile. “Would you sit with me? I would love to know what you’ve been up to.”

Peter quickly let go of his hand, before sitting down on the chair in front of Juno’s desk. Just as Juno’s worry started to rise up, Peter placed his hand on the table, almost begging to be held and who was Juno to deny such a request.

They talked for a long time. Juno told Peter how he had started to work on himself, how he was doing better, how much he’d missed the thief.

Peter, in turn, told him about how he had started to kill off his aliases., faking his death to make sure that he wouldn’t be hunted if he ever decided to settle down.

He told Juno about how he had bought that bouquet two months ago, keeping it with him until he came back to Hyperion. Juno told him that even though he wasn’t a lady for flowers, he liked them.

They talked for hours. So long that at some point, Rita walked in and Juno couldn’t stop himself from introducing Peter Ransom to her.

And that's when he knew that this was something more.

Something he wanted to make work.

And he knew that they would work on it, that they would figure it out.

They could do this.

Peter moved into the small house next to the clinic, working as an apprentice to Alan, who seemed to thrive, knowing that he was teaching another person to save lives.

But that housing situation didn't last long and, soon, Peter had moved in with Juno.

And if Juno sometimes woke up at the slightest sliver of sunrise because Peter forgot to close the blinds after a long day at work, he didn't get upset. He just watched how the sun painted Peter's sleeping form in a golden light, making his hair shine and making him even more beautiful than he already was.

On those mornings, Juno would watch him sleep for a short moment, before detangling himself from the thief, dropping a soft kiss on his forehead, yawning on his way to the kitchen, where he would prepare their breakfast in bed.

It was good, it was calm. And even though Peter still woke up from nightmares, that Juno helped calm, and Juno still couldn't see blood in barely any circumstance, they were doing well.

They were working it out.

They were happy.

Chapter End Notes

Last and final chapter is coming up **tomorrow!**

You can find me on Tumblr and on Twitter under Justthingstbh!

Epilogue: A Second Chance

Chapter Summary

Home.

Chapter Notes

So, here it is. The end.
It's strange to end this story that I've been working on for such a long time, but everything has to have an end.

I want to thank the most wonderful Fafsernir for being here when I needed her. For being a constant source of motivation, inspiration and just all in love, a wonderful friend. I owe her a lot and I'm just extremely grateful for her being here.

I also want to thank my wonderful artist Robin Kasznia who has been nothing but considerate, sweet and wonderful!

I want to thank all of those that have left comments and kudos, you are wonderful and I appreciate you all so much!

Now, I hope you enjoy the epilogue.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Peter?” Juno called as he came home, taking off his coat and hanging it on the hooks that they now shared. He toed off his boots and walked over the worn wooden floor, until subconsciously lifting his foot a little higher to step onto the rug that Peter had bought two months ago.

He didn’t even really have to think about any of that anymore, he knew that his coat hung closer to the door and that his side of the bed was the left one, so that he could turn onto his side to be the big spoon, pulling Peter close to him, without his shoulder acting up.

There was a simplicity in their way of life, even though it had been so

hard to achieve.

“I’m in the kitchen, dear!” he heard the soft call and he wouldn’t be able to stop his lips from forming a smile, even if he tried. His eyes fell onto the former thief, standing over a book while holding a piece of bread with cheese in his hand, absentmindedly chewing.

Juno walked over and gave the man a kiss on the cheek, just a small quick gesture that had gotten so worked into his routine that he didn’t know if he could ever come home not doing it.

“How was your meetup with Rita and Alessandra?” Peter asked, slipping the leather bookmark that Juno had gotten him for their first anniversary between the pages, before closing the book.

Juno sighed and stole a piece of the cheese from Peter’s bread at which the thief frowned. “I thought they wanted to go over a case, but it turns out that Alessandra just wanted us there to try different wedding cakes. I have never eaten that much sugar in my life.”

“You stinky little thief,” Peter smiled out after Juno was done. “Complaining about having too much food and then stealing my cheese.”

Juno snorted. “You’re the thief here, Nureyev.”

Peter put his hand on his forehead in a pretend faint. “How dare you say that? I have never stolen anything in my law-loving life.”

“That’s not true,” Juno grinned out, taking Peter’s hand in his and dropping a small kiss on the knuckles. “You stole my heart.”

The deputy heard a small, muttered: “sap,” from the other man, before

Peter spoke up. “That’s not true Juno, I traded yours for mine, that’s not stealing!”

As he watched the man’s grin get wider, Juno felt his heart soar. He loved this man. Every day, he was more and more grateful that he had him in his life.

“I suppose you’re right.” There was a short comfortable silence between them, before Juno spoke up again. “Oh, yeah, and Alessandra wants me to go dress shopping with her tomorrow and I really don’t understand.”

“I frankly don’t either, your taste in clothes is fine darling, but it’s not great.”

“Oh really, Mr. ‘I will wear a corset even though I already know it’s gonna make it hard for me to breathe’?

Peter raised an eyebrow at Juno and schooled his face in neutrality. “But did I look good in it?”

Juno let out a long sigh. “Yes, you looked amazing, back to my point, though-”

He told Peter about the plans that Rita had made, about the fact that he didn’t understand why he had to be there for most of it, if he wasn’t even a bridesmaid, in the end.

They talked, in the comfort of their own home, where Juno slept on the left side of the bed and Peter on the right, where their mugs stood next to each other every morning, because Peter set them out the evening before. In their home where Peter knew every creaking

floorboard and how to avoid them.

It wasn’t fancy, it wasn’t pretty per se, but it was theirs and theirs alone. And they loved it for it.

For being their home.

A few days after the wedding of Alessandra and Abigail, Juno and Peter were laying together on the couch. Juno was leaning against the arm rest and Peter was sitting between his legs, using Juno’s chest as a pillow.

Juno suddenly snorted, completely unprecedented and so sudden that Peter's head swivelled backwards from his book that he was reading: *Bodily anatomy* , something Alan had given him.

"Cred for your thoughts, darling?" He asked in a small voice, mostly to not disturb Juno's soft giggling, a sound that he'd never thought he'd appreciate as much as he did.

"I just had the thought that when we get married, I can't take your name, cause it's a secret, but, Peter Steel? That's a little on the nose isn't it?"

Now, that made Peter put his book down and turn in Juno's hold. " *When* we get Married? That a thought that's been crossing your mind a lot, Juno Steel?"

Juno paled, he had almost forgotten that he hadn't even asked Nureyev yet. It was something that had been on his mind for a while. Hells, why wouldn't he want to marry this perfect man?

"Well, uhm-" he stuttered and he felt his blood rise to his cheeks. "Honestly, yeah. I mean- it's not like we have to if you don't want to, you know? I'm fully content just being with you, but it's just something-" he started to ramble and as much as Peter enjoyed watching his love squirm, he loved saving him even more.

"Yes," he interrupted the Deputy, whose face immediately schooled itself in confusion, shock and delight.

"What?"

"Yes, Juno, I'd love to marry you. More than anything else."

Juno's grin spread over his face. "good,"

"Better than good even," Peter teased.

"One might even call it perfect," Juno added and pulled Peter towards him to give his lips a chaste kiss.

And then Peter turned once again in his grasp and laid his head back on Juno's chest. "So, any concrete plans you want to tell me about, or do I get to have a say?" He teased and Juno hit him lightly on the shoulder which made both of them burst into laughter.

Life was good. And Juno felt his shoulder sting lightly, but it had become a good pain, nothing harsh, just a reminder of how much his life had changed. And change, Juno found, is painful, but it's worth it.

Chapter End Notes

You can find me on Tumblr and on Twitter under Justthingstbh!
I hope you enjoyed it and please, take care of yourself. You deserve to have love and be happy. I hope you are all doing okay. Much love from me to you

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!